Paolo Sarpi: A Servant of God and State

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions

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Paolo Sarpi:
A Servant of God and State

By

Jaska Kainulainen

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Cover illustration: Engraving of Paolo Sarpi, made in the early nineteenth century by Vincenzo Giaconi (1760–1829).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kainulainen, Jaska.
Paolo Sarpi : a servant of God and state / by Jaska Kainulainen.
pages cm. — (Studies in medieval and reformation traditions ; volume 180)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-26114-3 (hardback : acid-free paper) — ISBN 978-90-04-26674-2 (e-book) 1. Sarpi, Paolo, 1552–1623. 2. Venice (Italy)—Intellectual life. 3. Historians—Italy—Venice—Biography. 4. Statesmen—Italy—Venice—Biography. 5. Servites—Italy—Venice—Biography. 6. Renaissance—Italy—Venice. 7. Venice (Italy)—Biography. 8. Venice (Italy)—History—1508–1797. I. Title.

DG678.317.K35 2014
195—dc23
[B]

2013046963

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual 'Brill' typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities.
For more information, please see brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1573-4188
ISBN 978 90 04 26114 3 (hardback)
ISBN 978 90 04 26674 2 (e-book)

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For Lucy and Atticus

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been written without the help and support of many friends and colleagues. While their contributions have greatly improved the quality of the book, I am responsible for any flaws and limitations which remain.

My first thanks go to professor emeritus Erkki Kouri who encouraged me to write my Master's thesis on Paolo Sarpi. This feels like a lifetime ago, but the memory of those early steps remains vivid. I would like to thank professor Martin van Gelderen for supervising my PhD thesis—of which this book is a revised version—at the European University Institute in Florence. I am also grateful for having had the chance to attend his seminars, which were the best part of my training as an intellectual historian. Thank you also to professor Lea Campos Boralevi for commenting on the first full draft of the thesis and for discussing the work as a member of my jury. I am grateful to professor Markku Peltonen, not only for discussing the thesis as the chair of my jury, but also for his kind support over many years. I would like to thank professor Bartolomé Yul Casalilla for his contribution as a member of my jury. Professor Janet Coleman discussed my work during her stay in Florence, for which I am also very grateful.

In writing this book, the friendship of many colleagues at the EUI helped me more than I can here express. Special thanks go to Drs. Adriana Luna-Fabritius, Ere Nokkala, Henk Looijesteijn, Gerben Zaagsma, Freya Sierhuis, Cesare Cuttica, Eleni Braat, Henning Trüper, Holger Berg and Matthias Roick.

I am grateful to Brill editors Arjan van Dijk and Ivo Romein, and Professor Andrew Colin Gow, editor-in-chief of the Brill series *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*. I would also like to thank the anonymous reader of the manuscript for useful comments. The cover image of Paolo Sarpi is courtesy of the National Library of Medicine, US.

In closing, I want to thank my mother Pirjo and my brother Ilja for having always been there for me. Finally, thank you to Dr Lucy Turner Voakes, who has helped me to finish the project and continues to remind me, with love, of the importance of being curious. This book is dedicated to Atticus and her.

Abbreviations

ASV	Archivio di stato di Venezia
BNM	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana
IIAS	Sarpi, Paolo, *Istoria dell'interdetto ed altri scritti editi e inediti*, 3 vols. Bari 1940.
Interdetto	Sarpi, Paolo, *Istoria del interdetto*, in Sarpi, *Scritti scelti*.
SG	Sarpi, Paolo, *Scritti giurisdizionalistici*, Bari 1958.
SS	Sarpi, Paolo, *Scritti Scelti*, Torino 1968.
Tridentino	Sarpi Paolo, *Istoria del concilio Tridentino*, Torino 1974.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This book is an intellectual biography of Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623), an erudite historian, theologian and adviser to the senate of Venice during the final blossoming of the republic before its gradual decline in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It focuses on Sarpi's intellectual activities and achievements, including his natural philosophy, religious views and political ideas, which he formulated as adviser to the senate. It was precisely the role of a public sage that allowed Sarpi to express his political views, which would otherwise likely have remained unknown to us. It should be stressed that although he was nominated a legal and theological adviser—or state theologian—in practice his work was that of a political adviser. Holding this position from his nomination in January 1606 until his death in 1623, he made a significant contribution to the political discourse of early seventeenth-century Venice and through it, to a series of wider, European debates on church-state relations. Most of Sarpi's histories were highly politicized and can be seen as by-products of his political career. His correspondence reflects similarly ecclesio-political concerns. The only part of Sarpi's writings that was not directly related to his work as a legal or political adviser comprised his philosophical notes, the so-called *pensieri*. These were short sketches on a wide variety of topics related to natural philosophy, religion and society, and have been described as "sort of a note-book and an emaciated intellectual diary".[1] Unlike the rest of Sarpi's writings, the *pensieri* were never intended for publication. This and the ambiguous style of the *pensieri* has posed a persistent methodological problem to historians, since it is difficult to treat them as systematic and coherent source material. They have nevertheless been read as proof of Sarpi's clandestine atheism, a claim which, as this book demonstrates, runs clearly counter to the resolutely religious nature of his published writings.[2]

The central argument of this book is that Sarpi was a believer whose religio-political ideals were essentially in line with those of St. Paul, St. Augustine and sixteenth-century reformers (both Protestant and Catholic). For Sarpi, there

1 Sosio 1986, p. 155: "*una sorta di taccuino e scarno diario intellettuale*".

2 Wootton 1983, pp. 3–5, 136–145. Wootton's interpretation of Sarpi as an atheist has been accepted for example by Martinich 1992, p. 374 note 2; Tuck 1993, pp. 98–99; Rahe 1994, p. 14; Mori 2007, p. 264.

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was no difference between serving the senate of Venice and serving God. I base this claim on careful analysis of the *pensieri* and acceptance of the evident, prima facie meaning expressed in Sarpi's other writings. While it is legitimate to ask whether the *pensieri* can tell us anything about Sarpi's religious belief, they certainly provide information about his understanding of the interplay between society, religion and political power. Furthermore, the short composition known as *Pensieri sulla religione* shows that whenever Sarpi reflected upon religion, he studied the problem strictly as a social phenomenon. It should be underlined that, in contrast to claims that the *pensieri* functioned as a form of clandestine religious confession, they were in fact the result of Sarpi's philosophical explorations of a wide variety of topics.

My interpretation opposes the line of scholarship that has read the *pensieri* as evidence of atheism. The view of Sarpi as an unbeliever has made much of his observation that as soon as men realize that they are not capable of acquiring everything they happen to desire, they "fabricate out of their caprices someone who would have" those things. This, Sarpi concluded, was "the source of all human miseries".[3] According to David Wootton this passage implies that "to compensate for their own sense of frustration men invent an omnipotent God, capable of doing what they are unable to do".[4] To my mind, however, the passage is too ambiguous to make such a far-reaching claim. In the first place, why would men conceive of God (I take it that God is usually considered something good) as the source of all their miseries? Secondly, Sarpi does not mention God in this *pensiero*. I think it makes more sense to read the passage as follows: when men realized that they could not have everything they wanted, they created institutions like the papacy, for instance, led by a figure such as an infallible pope, a figure worthy of reverence and emulation. The point that Sarpi is making is that men are never satisfied with what they have and therefore constantly imagine figures, be it the pope or a neighbor, in whose invented perfection they can submerge their own deficiencies. I read Sarpi rather as identifying the self-deceptive worship of false heroes—not the invention of God—as a more likely source of misery. The fact that the *pensiero* in question was written between 1585 and 1588 when Sarpi was in Rome is also significant, since his stay in the centre of the Christian world turned out to be devastating experience, one that convinced him of the need for a reform within the Church of Rome. On this basis it seems probable that the *pensiero* refers to the pope

3 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 277, p. 235: "*poiché conosce che non v'ha in sé virtù d'acquistar le cose desiderate . . . si fabbrica di suo capriccio chi le abbia . . . questa è la radice delle miserie umane*".

4 Wootton 1983, p. 18.

rather than to God. This interpretation is in line with Sarpi's continual treatment of papal power as the source of all political turmoil, i.e. misery.

The *pensieri* can hardly be seen as a demonstration of religious belief or unbelief, since they do not deal with this question in any sense directly. They do not discuss the nature of God, simply because Sarpi considered it unfathomable, and when they touch on religion, they do so from the point of view of a detached, impersonal study on the external and earthly aspects of religion. The viewpoint of personal belief is notably absent. This is not to say that the *pensieri* entirely lack references to divinity, since *pensieri* nos. 136, 138 and 270 refer to God as an omniscient being. Why would Sarpi refer to God in such a manner, which implies that he took God's existence for granted, if he was an atheist? It has been suggested that he did so in order to "dramatise and enliven philosophical arguments".[5] But if the *pensieri* were never meant to be published, why would Sarpi have felt the need to dramatise and enliven them? My conclusion has been therefore that there is no reason to assume that the *pensieri* were written by an atheist. This conclusion is significant not only from the point of view of our understanding of Sarpi's character, but also because it has implications for the wider religious culture of the period and, at the same time, calls forth a reassessment of the popularity of atheism in early-modern Europe.

At least for a number of years, the sixteenth-century scientific revolution played a major role in Sarpi's intellectual life. An enthusiast for the new science and a friend of Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Sarpi's worldview was markedly materialistic and naturalistic, a fact, which further contributed to his notoriety amongst contemporary supporters of the papacy. Notwithstanding this, I maintain that to elevate God to the highest position, indeed, to a position incomprehensible to human intellect, and to lower man to a level little higher than that of animals (in some respects lower than animals), as Sarpi did, cannot be grounds for claiming he was an atheist. It should be recalled that during this period, accusations of atheism were often politically motivated. The Church of Rome did not judge infamous philosophers such as Pietro Pomponazzi, as long as they openly confessed the Catholic faith. Thinkers like Sarpi and Thomas Hobbes posed a far more dangerous threat, since they explicitly attacked the Catholic church by challenging the role and nature of its crux, the papacy. Consequently, Sarpi's writings were scrutinized for heresies and other discrediting contents. As a result he was excommunicated, a state of disgrace he shared with his colleagues and the entire senate of Venice.

5 Wootton 1983, p. 18.

In general, Sarpi's *pensieri* draw on Aristotelianism, Epicureanism and Stoicism, but they also testify to his interest in science, specifically, to the influence of Copernicanism and to his adoption of Galileo's ideas about motion. Sarpi's understanding of the universe was based on the law of causation and natural determinism and his ontology was fundamentally materialistic.[6] In some respects, his adherence to natural determinism correlates with his acceptance of the Calvinistic version of predestination. This is not to say that natural determinism and Calvinistic predestination were interchangeable within Sarpi's thought. They nevertheless enabled Sarpi to build a worldview according to which the significance of the deeds of an individual was reduced to a minimum, while every meaningful action originated from God and was realized by an institutionalized constituent of sovereign power, which in turn represented the divine will. The gravity of this structure within Sarpi's understanding explains the ease with which he repressed his own will and submitted himself to the service of higher powers.

Sarpi's political theory was influenced by his religious thought, his natural philosophy and his idea of the nature of man. Indeed, Sarpi's view that everything in nature was in a constant state of motion fed into his urge for a political system which would best guarantee a stable and tranquil life for citizens. He saw it as the very purpose of the organized society to establish control over all those elements that were moving, changing and fluctuating in human life. This was by no means an original point of view. On the contrary, the wars and conquests of the sixteenth century (from sacco di Roma to the battle of Lepanto, from Schmalkaldic wars to the French wars of religion) gave birth to many treatises, which expressed an anxious longing for peace and tranquility. This was a phenomenon best illustrated by the popularity of Neostoic philosophy. Sarpi himself was influenced by Neostoicism—especially by its advocacy of obedience—and drew on the same intellectual traditions as Justus Lipsius, Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron.[7] These learned men called for constancy in the face of adversity and stood in opposition to any innovation that challenged the status quo in prevailing political systems. Sarpi and Lipsius in particular urged subjects to obey their secular rulers, whom at least Sarpi invested with absolute power.

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6 Amerio 1950, p. 36; Vivanti 1967, p. 1086; Sosio 1986, *passim*.

7 On Sarpi's familiarity with and similarity to Montaigne and Charron, see Cozzi 1969, pp. 23–24, 31–34; Cozzi 1995, pp. 337, 354–355; Frajese 1990; Frajese 1994, pp. 141–165; Wootton 1983, pp. 24–28; Cozzi 1996, pp. xl, xlv, liv–lv, lxxv, lxxvii, lxxxiv; Tuck 1993, p. 97; Miller 2000, pp. 33–36. According to Pin 1999, p. 599, Sarpi referred to Charron as a 'judicious' writer in a draft of his letter to Groslot de l'Isle.

In this book I show that in addition to advocating Stoic obedience, Sarpi's political theory rested heavily on the theory of absolutism. In contrast to William Bouwsma's 1968 interpretation of Sarpi as a defender of republican values, I argue that the language of Sarpi's key texts eschewed any sign of classical republicanism and, instead, brimmed with such absolutistic notions as 'prince' and 'majesty'.[8] Sarpi's sympathy for absolutism is particularly evident in his recently discovered treatise *Della potestà de' Principi*, and it seems evident that in this respect his inspiration came from France. His correspondence with Gallican thinkers such as Jacques Leschassier and Jacques Gillot reveals a long-standing interest in and admiration for the French political system, especially with regard to the kingdom's independence from the papacy. Furthermore, it is clear that Sarpi read the French political philosopher Jean Bodin (1530–1596), whose ideas were seminal for the development of seventeenth-century absolutism. In particular, Sarpi was familiar with Bodin's theory of sovereignty, which the latter elaborated in what was to become one of the most famous expositions of sixteenth-century political theory, the *Six livres de la république* (1576). Sarpi's familiarity with French political thought was no doubt enhanced by the fact that he had two friends in common with Bodin, namely, Jacques Gillot and Arnaud du Ferrier.[9]

There also are manifest similarities between the political ideas of Sarpi and the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). The latter was an advocate of absolutism and regarded the clergy's involvement in politics as conducive to a 'kingdom of darkness'. Hobbes knew of Sarpi through the correspondence between Fulgenzio Micanzio (1570–1659), Sarpi's closest friend and associate, and Lord Cavendish, Hobbes' employer. The correspondence took place in 1615–1628 and it was Hobbes' task as Cavendish's tutor to translate Micanzio's letters for his employer.[10] Cavendish was in Venice in the spring of

8 Bouwsma 1968, *passim*.

9 Gillot was a jurist who worked for the parliament of Paris and Du Ferrier was one of Bodin's teachers and the French ambassador to Venice in 1563–1567 and 1570–1582. Ulianich 1961, p. lxxxiv: the friendship between Sarpi and Gillot was "più che viva"; Berriot 1984, p. xxii, note 40: Bodin remarked in a letter to Bignon that "*Mr Gillot est bien de mes amis*"; for Sarpi's friendship with Du Ferrier, see for example Cozzi 1969, pp. 9–10; for Du Ferrier's and Bodin's friendship, see Cozzi 1979, p. 240; Rose 1980, p. 22; see also Frajese 1994, pp. 64–65, according to whom Du Ferrier informed Venetians about the popularity of Neostoicism in France.

10 De Vivo 2006, p. 239, suggests that the letters which Micanzio wrote to William Cavendish before Sarpi's death (that is, 45 letters out of the total of 65) could actually be attributed to both Micanzio and Sarpi. The two Servite friars were certainly very close friends, but I am doubtful with regard to Sarpi's contribution to these letters.

1615 and stayed at the residence of the ambassador Dudley Carleton—a correspondent of Sarpi's—and it is possible that Hobbes accompanied his employer to Venice.[11]

Sarpi's interests were heterodox, even by the standards of an early-modern erudite. As a fresh interpretation of the central themes of Sarpi's thought and his significance for early-modern political thought, this book addresses three major intellectual contexts: natural philosophy, religion, and political theory. Each of these fields has its particular set of traditions and languages, a fact which poses a challenge to the historian seeking coherence in Sarpi's intellectual life. The merits of analysing such different contexts within a single historical narrative have been questioned for example by Leo Strauss who argued that natural philosophy (or modern science) and political theory are incompatible, since the former deals with the supra-human and the latter with human affairs. This is why Strauss questioned such an approach to Hobbes.[12] Yet, for Sarpi it is clear that these categories overlapped and were mutually constitutive. The coherence I ascribe to Sarpi's thought issues mainly from two premises: in the first place, Sarpi maintained that everything was natural and bound by the natural law of causation; secondly, in his view everything, including the natural law of causation, depended upon God's will. According to this point of view it had pleased God to create a restless universe, in which one thing happened after another, incessantly and according to a strictly determined causal order. But it had also pleased God to provide mankind with sovereign power, which guarded against chaos and anarchy that prevailed in the state of nature. Sarpi's natural philosophy, religious ideas and political theory were intertwined, and I ascribe a greater degree of coherence to his thought than has previously been the case. If we recognize Sarpi's belief in the naturalness of things and his notion of God as the source of everything Strauss' distinction between human and supra-human seems less relevant, not the least because,

11 We do know that Hobbes travelled with Cavendish elsewhere in France and Italy between 1610 and 1615. Cavendish must have met Micanzio at some point during the summer of 1615, since the two began their correspondence soon after Cavendish returned to England in October of the same year. In his footnote to Micanzio, *Lettere*, p. 33, Roberto Ferrini claims that Hobbes was in Venice with Cavendish. For a more sceptical point of view, see Gabrieli 1957, p. 197.

12 Strauss, Leo, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*. The University of Chicago Press 1952, p. ix: "traditional metaphysics were . . . 'anthropomorphistic' and, therefore, a proper basis for a philosophy of things human; modern science, on the other hand, which tried to interpret nature by renouncing all 'anthropomorphisms', all conceptions of purpose and perfection, could, therefore, to say the least, contribute nothing to the understanding of things human, to the foundation of morals and politics".

according to Sarpi's understanding of order in the universe, both nature and political power owed their existence to the will of God. Although Sarpi's natural philosophy dealt with problems such as 'motion' and 'matter', while his political theory focused on 'obedience' and 'subjects', I argue that he was to a large extent talking about one and the same thing: the incessant interplay between motion and control.

It is therefore important to question whether Sarpi can usefully be described as a 'modern' thinker. He clearly sought to move beyond Aristotelian science and separated the temporal from the spiritual. As such it might appear that his thinking was marked by a degree of secularity, even modernity. Yet, his eventual abandonment of natural sciences and his admiration for the early church testify to the fact that his mindset was also, and perhaps predominantly, that of a medieval friar. What distinguished his approach from modern (not to say post-modern) thinking was its basis in coherence and unity. Moreover, we should be wary of overestimating the innovative nature of Sarpi's scientific ideas: attempts to go beyond Aristotelian science had been made already in the beginning of the sixteenth century. As far as the separation between temporal and spiritual is concerned, Luther had already in the 1520s propounded a famous theory of two kingdoms. Therefore, I suggest that what may initially strike us as modern in Sarpi's thought, might more accurately be understood as his contribution to traditional debates on such problems as the accuracy of Aristotelian science and the relations between church and state. The quintessence of Sarpi's worldview remained medieval in that he readily and thoroughly submitted himself to God's will.

Intellectual historians may be at risk of seeing coherence where there is none.[13] With this in mind, I do not claim that there is flawless coherence in everything that Sarpi wrote. I do argue that he was consistent in his absolutism, anti-papism and anticlericalism, as well as in his materialism, naturalism and determinism.[14] His disposition too, was unchangeably sceptical and pessimistic. Each of these traits can be detected in all different genres of his writings. Furthermore, although Sarpi is often ambiguous and contradictory, I have found no passages in his writings which would refute his absolutism, or undermine his constant criticism of the papacy and the clergy. As to his natural philosophy, the very nature of the *pensieri* is probatory rather than assertive, but

13 For this point, see Skinner 2002, vol. I, pp. 67–72.

14 Throughout this book, by Sarpi's 'anti-papism' I mean his disapproval of the popes' interference in political affairs, not a rejection of the pope's position as the spiritual leader of Christianity. Also, by Sarpi's anticlericalism I indicate his critical attitude towards the clergy's mundane interests, not criticism of their spiritual role and duties.

it is nevertheless acknowledged that his philosophy was based on and defined by materialism, naturalism and determinism.[15]

Working on three different historical contexts with their own specific languages requires sensitivity to different types of rhetoric, writing styles, objectives and modes of persuasion. While in his political writings Sarpi quite naturally aimed to persuade his readers, the *pensieri* were subject to no such requirement. The *consulti* (counsels he wrote for the senate as its adviser) were part of contemporary political discourse and dealt with questions such as sovereignty and independence from papal power. These texts were imbued with rhetoric and determined by political intent. They can be understood as speech acts, utterances, whose meaning was inherent in the function they performed within a given language game.[16] The *pensieri* are different in that they were scientific instead of political, void of rhetoric and politically motivated intentions, and therefore consisted of concepts and formulations that aspired to meaning and truth, rather than authority or power. Sarpi's letters can be situated somewhere between the *pensieri* and his political writings. They were private, but always addressed to a particular recipient and therefore part of a discourse within which Sarpi was pursuing certain personal goals. Sarpi's religious ideas are scattered across different types of texts—political and historical writings, letters and *pensieri*—and expressed through political rhetoric when he refers to church, clergy and the papacy, and through reverential silence or compliance whenever he alludes to divine matters *per se*. It is vital to remember that Sarpi divided religion into earthly and heavenly spheres, the first being politicized, the latter pure and beyond human understanding. If this division is ignored, his comments on religion and God appear confusing and, at times, contradictory.

While it is entirely appropriate to interpret Sarpi's political writings with the so-called speech act—method, the *pensieri* require a slightly different approach. I interpret the *pensieri* as an utterly unrhetorical attempt to explain the world or the universe; as an unsystematic and imperfect articulation of some of those fundamental scientific principles which gave shape to his political thought. His letters provide an invaluable link between the *consulti* and the *pensieri*, not the least because they confirm his fideism, anti-papism, absolutism and his interest in various scientific and humanistic issues. While Sarpi's correspondence is not devoid of simulation and rhetoric, it does provide a relatively sincere expression of his opinions. As Sarpi himself declared, "the most

15 Amerio 1950, pp. 25–26, 31–36; Sosio 1996a, p. cxii; Cozzi 1996, p. lxxxvi.

16 Skinner 2002, vol. I, pp. 2–5.

sincere and faithful history one extracts from the letters of the Fathers and of the other writers of each period". His decision to destroy the letters he received from his correspondents offers a further, striking illustration of how seriously he took this genre of writing.[17]

By the time Sarpi was nominated state theologian in 1606 he had studied and reflected on religious and scientific questions for a period of forty years. In the course of these decades his materialistic worldview had hardened into a solid determinism, which in turn shaped his characteristically fideistic, sceptical and pessimistic disposition. Concurrently, his ecclesiological ideas became ossified to a degree that any reader of his political and historical writings can sense a strong impatience whenever he touches on the nature of the papacy or the clergy. Not surprisingly, anti-papism, anticlericalism and absolutism form the most conspicuous and consistent tenets of his political thought. Sarpi propounded a coherent criticism of the popes' claim to temporal power and in so doing resorted to an extreme version of divine right theory, according to which secular rulers obtained their power directly from God (as opposed to the milder version of the theory, which proposed that this transfer of power was indirect).

There is a strong sense of coherence between Sarpi's natural philosophy, which emphasized the triviality of man's role in the universe, his fideism and his ensuing refusal to speculate about divine matters, and his political doctrine, which invested the sovereign ruler with absolute power and demanded unconditional obedience from all subjects, regardless whether they belonged to the laity or the clergy. It would be mistaken to assume that this apparently coherent system—in which God's will was all-determining—came into being at once. Certain elements, such as scepticism and materialism, were present in Sarpi's thought already in the late 1570s when he wrote his first *pensieri*, others, such as divine right theory, appear only in his *consulti* written three decades later. Each of these elements create a picture of a Venetian thinker less contradictory and ambiguous than historians have often intimated.

However, Sarpi's character was not free of inconsistencies. The complexity of his disposition is reflected in his worldly ambition, for example. Indeed, he embraced determinism, ascetism, poverty, modesty and *contemptus mundi*

17 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Francois Hotman, 22 July 1608, p. 174: "*La più sincera et fedel historia si cava delle epistole delli padri et altri scrittori di ciascun tempo*"; Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 14 September 1610, p. 133: "*Io non soglio mai conservar lettera alcuna de'amici, per tutti quei rispetti che possono occorrere nelli tempi seguenti, ma, dopo lette, le dissipo tutte*".

and yet wrote many politically motivated histories and *consulti*, which aimed to change the world around him. With this in mind, it is worth mentioning that in his biography of Sarpi Micanzio described his friend's character as one marked by a rare "couplement of virtues" such as "knowledge and humility" and "seclusiveness and politeness".[18] The contrast between Sarpi's ambition and humility becomes less pronounced when we take into account his own assessment of himself as a "weak instrument of God". This introspective remark explains why an otherwise pessimistic and deterministic mendicant friar would wish to participate in the *vita activa.* In Sarpi's view God was the omnipotent source of everything and man a wretched sinner, who could only submit himself to the service of God. This he could do either by contemplating God, praying and ministering the services of the church, or by serving the state. Until the beginning of the interdict crisis in 1606 Sarpi was a servant of God in the original meaning of the term. He was exclusively a Servite friar who not only performed various ministerial tasks in his church, but also became one of the leaders of his order. From January 1606 onwards, however, he served God primarily through his position as an adviser to the senate of Venice. Fundamentally, in his view, he performed a service to God when he served the government; he was not merely an adviser, but someone who served a 'prince', a 'minister of God'. I believe Sarpi's move away from pastoral ministry into governmental service was the result of his dissatisfaction both with his experiences in Rome and with his fellow Servites.[19] He judged members of the clergy—from the humblest of friars to the pope himself—increasingly neglectful of the spiritual aspect of their pastoral vocation and chose to serve God through a governmental office rather than by ministering ceremonies of a church he considered corrupt and little more than a travesty of the original, apostolic congregation of believers. Becoming a servant of the state appeared thus the best way for him to remain a true servant of God.

The most important source that we have on Sarpi's life is Fulgenzio Micanzio's biography, which dates from the early 1620s (although it was not published until 1646).[20] Micanzio's aim was to clear Sarpi's poor reputation.

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18 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1396: "*l'accopiamento delle virtù . . . che non così ordinariamente sogliono torvarsi congionte, scienza et umiltà . . . ritiratezza et officiosità*".

19 For the problems that Sarpi had with other Servites, see Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1309–1318, 1326–1328; Cozzi 1969, pp. 5, 24–29.

20 For the dating of the biography, see Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1345, where he remarks that the *present* doge of Venice is Francesco Contarini (he was doge in 1623–1624). See also Corrado Vivanti's footnote.

The *padre* Paolo that Micanzio depicts is perfectly pious, ascetic and omniscient sage whose purity had been unjustly questioned not only by papists, but also by some of his Servite colleagues, who were jealous of his rapid ascent within the hierarchy of the order. To Micanzio, Sarpi was "the innocent father, who enjoyed a virtuous quiet", a "divine soul" or "divine oracle", for whom no problem proved too difficult to be solved.[21] With the beginning of the interdict crisis in the early 1606 Sarpi's "virtuous quiet" was abruptly shattered and he was thrown into the maelstrom of active, political life. Disturbing as this may have been to Sarpi the scholar, this shift was welcomed by Sarpi the politician. His willingness to serve a common cause is reflected by Micanzio's remark that "a man is not born for himself, but for his fatherland in the first place and for the common good". The same attitude was present in Sarpi's first *consulto*, in which he claimed that he had been waiting "ardently" for a chance to serve his "prince".[22]

Public life and especially Sarpi's role as the main propagandist of the Venetian cause meant that he was soon involved in heated debates, which exposed him to both verbal and physical attacks. As Micanzio later testified, "the maledictions against our father are countless, the impostures and the calumnies are more impudent and more notoriously false, than perhaps ever invented against anyone". The attacks against Sarpi were unjust, Micanzio argued, because he was only performing his duty. He divided his life into activity and contemplation, "giving to God what he could, to his prince what he had to".[23] Micanzio's *Vita* set the tone for a panegyric tradition to which many writers contributed over the following centuries.[24] While it was typical of this tradition to depict Sarpi as a heroic defender of freedom against the persecution carried out by the court of Rome, advocates of the papacy usually considered

21 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1311, 1358, 1396.

22 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1329: "*l'uomo non è per se nato, ma per la patria principalmente e per il bene commune*"; Sarpi, *SS*, p. 444.

23 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1343: "*Le maledicenze contra il nostro padre sono innumerabili, le imposture e le calonnie le più notoriamente false, che forse mai contra alcuno fossero inventate*" . . . "*con prestar a Dio quello che poteva, al suo principe quello che doveva*".

24 These include, for example, John Milton, *Areopagitica; a speech of Mr. John Milton for the liberty of unlicens'd printing, to the Parliament of England*, London 1644; Thomas Pierce, *A Vindication of the King's Sovereign rights*, London 1683; Voltaire, *Essais sur les moeurs*, Genève 1756; Francesco Griselini, *Memorie anedote spettanti alla vita ed agli studi del sommo filosofo e giureconsulto Fra Paolo Servita*, Lausanne 1760; Alexander Robertson, *Fra Paolo Sarpi. The greatest of Venetians*, London 1893.

him a wicked heretic or atheist.[25] Both of these interpretations were deeply biased and affected by the writers' religious and political views.

In writing this book, I have drawn on Italian and Anglophone research traditions. My interpretation of Sarpi's thought thus engages with the tradition of history of ideas as it is practiced in many British and American universities. At the same time, it is fundamentally indebted to the work of Italian Sarpi scholars such as Gaetano and Luisa Cozzi, Boris Ulianich, Corrado Pin, Libero Sosio, Corrado Vivanti and Vittorio Frajese. These and other Italian scholars have produced pivotal editions of Sarpi's works, together with detailed studies on various aspects of his life and writing. I believe that these research traditions are complementary and that their value to my work is evident.

Following this introduction, chapter 2 begins with a brief account of Sarpi's life and moves on to describe his relations with the nobility of Venice. This is followed by an analysis of Sarpi's natural philosophy (chapter 3). I pay particular attention here to his theory of epistemology and concept of motion, and in so doing emphasize the materialistic, sceptical and deterministic foundations of his thought. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss Sarpi's religious ideas. The first of these offers an interpretation of Sarpi's Augustinianism and analyzes his ideas about reason, passions, happiness and relativism. Chapter 5 in turn identifies Sarpi as a Christian mortalist; a Christian who denied the idea of the soul's natural immortality. In chapter 6 I discuss Sarpi's ecclesio-political ideas, focusing on his understanding of church-state relations, his concept of the papacy, and his theory of the two kingdoms, the spiritual and the temporal. The final two chapters offer an interpretation of Sarpi's political thought. Chapter 7 begins with a description of the interdict of Venice and moves on to analyze Sarpi's concepts of sovereignty and obedience. I provide evidence for Sarpi's adoption of absolutism and divine right theory. The last chapter of the book (chapter 8) focuses on Sarpi's idea of statecraft and points out his debt to Niccolò Machiavelli and reason of state literature. It also presents a brief analysis on the linkage between history and politics, and argues that, for Sarpi, history was an important rhetorical tool and a key element of the art of ruling. The epilogue closes with a brief summary of my interpretation of Sarpi's thought.

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25 See, for instance, Hernando Della Bastida, *Antidoto alle velenose considerationi di Fra Paolo di Venetia sopra le censure di N.S.P. Paolo V, nel quale si scuoprono gli errori, spropositi, & inganni di questo Autore*, Roma 1607; Sforza Pallavicino, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, Roma 1656–1657; Ludwig von Pastor, *Storia dei Papi*. Vol. XII. Versione Italiana di Mons. Prof. Pio Cenci. Roma 1962.

CHAPTER 2

Sarpi's Venice

Sarpi's Life

In his *Vita del padre Paolo*, Fulgenzio Micanzio describes Sarpi's parents as a curiously disproportionate couple. His father was a merchant and, according to Micanzio, short, dark and of a violent nature. He died penniless when Sarpi was still young. Sarpi's mother was a tall and white-skinned Venetian, humble, gentle, and—Micanzio continued—religious as a saint. Pietro Sarpi was born on 14 August 1552, but upon entering the Servite order at the age of thirteen (despite opposition from his mother and uncle, who had taken custody of him) he changed his name to Paolo. His admiration for St. Paul was thus already apparent at this early stage of his life. As a young novice, Sarpi studied theology and philosophy under the guidance of the Servite father Giovanni Maria Capella (1520–1582/1585) whose theological views drew on St. Augustine and Duns Scotus. True to his Augustinian inspiration Capella maintained, for example, that without help from divine grace man was incapable of good works and remained slave to his own wretchedness. This idea was to become one of the defining characteristics of Sarpi's thought, which suggests that Capella was a major influence behind his Augustinian view of man.

In 1567, at the age of fifteen, Sarpi attended the general congregation of the Servite order in Bologna. He participated in a debate on theological and juridical questions and was consequently encouraged by Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597)—cardinal and archbishop of Bologna—to move on to study 'greater and weightier' matters. In 1570 Sarpi defended his 309 theses on theology and natural philosophy in a scholastic disputation in Mantua, where he passed the following four years as personal theologian to duke Guglielmo Gonzaga (1538–1587). This experience prepared Sarpi for his future role as the principal adviser to the senate of Venice. In Mantua Sarpi also made the acquaintance of Camillo Ulivo who had been a legate to the pope Pius IV (1559–1565) in the council of Trent. Ulivo provided Sarpi with first-hand information about the council, which, convening several times between 1545–1563, was one of the key political events of the century. It was, however, only much later that Sarpi found time to write his extensive and well-known history of the council of Trent: he wrote the book when already serving the senate as state theologian and, in 1619, the manuscript was published in London at the initiative of

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Marc'Antonio de Dominis, the resigned archbishop of Spoleto who had fled to England in 1616.[1]

Between 1574–1576 Sarpi was in Milan, where he participated in attempts to reform the local church under the leadership of cardinal Carlo Borromeo (1538–1584). He became friends with the French ambassador Arnauld du Ferrier (1508–1585) who had represented his sovereign Charles IX in the council of Trent. The first blemish on Sarpi's orthodoxy appeared in this period, when he was accused of having denied the possibility of deriving the concept of Trinity from the first book of Moses, but the accusation had no serious consequences. On the contrary, after having attained doctorate in theology at the University of Padua in 1578 Sarpi climbed fast in the hierarchy of the Servite order and was nominated prior of the Venetian province at the age of 27. He was one of three Servites chosen to reform the rules of the order. This rapid rise did not come without difficulties, however, and he was soon defamed by jealous fellow Servites, who accused him of having contact with Jews. By the time he entered public life, Sarpi had already been interrogated by the inquisition twice. His reputation as an unorthodox friar cost him the episcopacy of Caorle in 1600 and that of Nona in the following year.[2]

Following his work as provincial prior in 1579–1582, Sarpi dedicated a period of three years to studying natural sciences. His enjoyment of what Micanzio referred to as "saintly and virtuous rest" was cut short when he was elected to the office of general procurator, a position of authority second only to the general prior in the hierarchy of the Servite order. This took him to Rome, where he remained between 1585–1588. Here he made the personal acquaintance of dignitaries such as Sixtus V (1585–1590), cardinal Giovanni Battista Castagna (1521–1590) who—as Urban VII—headed the Church of Rome for thirteen days in 1590, the Spanish theologian Martín de Azpilcueta (1491–1586) and Nicolas Alfonso Bobadilla (1511–1590), one of the first Jesuits and surviving companions of Ignatius Loyola. In Rome he also met cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621)

1 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1275–1279, 1281. Branchesi 2006, p. 47, points out that Sarpi entered the Servite order and changed his name on 24 November 1565 and not in 1566 as Micanzio claimed. For Giovanni Maria Capella, see *ibid.*, p. 50, and Boris Ulianich's entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Volume 18 (1975); for cardinal Paleotti, see Branchesi 2006, p. 54.

2 Ulianich 1961, pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

who would later become the spokesman of the Roman side in the interdict crisis and with whom Sarpi remained on amicable terms throughout his life.[3]

According to the constitution of the Servites the *procuratore* of the order was expected to be a well-educated and prudent theologian, capable of preaching in the papal chapel, a duty he was expected to undertake twice a year. He should be sincere in his faith and beyond all doubt of heresy. The *procuratore* required at least three years of teaching experience and was expected to have joined the order at least fifteen years prior to the appointment. His principal task was to represent the Servite order in the Roman curia and to handle issues from all provinces and monasteries.[4] Apart from the minor accusations mentioned above, nothing suggests that Sarpi did not meet these requirements or failed to perform his duties as the *procuratore*. It is nevertheless evident that Rome was a harrowing disappointment to him. When his Venetian Servite colleague and the future general of the order Gabriele Dardano wrote him and asked him to pursue a career in Rome, Sarpi's reply made his distaste for the city clear: "what do you want me to hope for in Rome, where only pimps, male prostitutes and other ministers of pleasure or money have success?"[5]

The esteem to which Sarpi had risen by this time is illustrated by an incident within the Servite order. In 1589 pope Sixtus V received several complaints about Giovanni Battista Libranzio, the general prior of the order in 1588–1590. Libranzio, a former professor of metaphysics, had failed to control a number of riotous friars in the Servite monastery of Bologna. In order to pacify the tumultuous situation Sixtus V sent Sarpi to Bologna in the rank of an apostolic visitor, invested with full authority to judge the case. Sarpi's solution was to send troublemakers to different monasteries all over Italy. He also set out 21 decrees—following the constitution of the Servite order—in order to reform cloistral life. Soon after this episode, however, each of the friars Sarpi had ostracized returned to their cloister in Bologna.[6] Having been disappointed first at the corruption in Rome and then at the hapless outcome of his reformation in Bologna, Sarpi returned to Venice and turned, once again, to studies and scientific activities. He soon became friends with Galileo Galilei who had been granted the chair of mathematics at the University of Padua in 1592. Towards

3 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1286–1288, 1291, 1295–1296; Da Pozzo 1968, pp. 87–88; Branchesi 2006, p. 64.

4 Logan 1996, p. 73.

5 Branchesi 2006, p. 63; Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1298, note 2: "*E che volete ch'io speri in Roma, ove li soli ruffiani, cenedi et altri ministri di piaceri o di guadagni hanno ventura?*". For the translation of '*cenedi*', see Vivanti 2005, p. 49: "*prostituti omosessuali*".

6 Branchesi 2006, pp. 65–66; Bianchi-Giovini 1836, p. 112.

the end of the 1590s Sarpi dedicated himself to the study of history and moral philosophy.[7] This was a peaceful decade in his life, only fleetingly threatened when Gabriele Dardano informed the inquisition about Sarpi's letter in which he referred to Rome as a crucible for pimps and prostitutes. Dardano's report added a further blemish to Sarpi's poor reputation in Rome.[8]

The senate of Venice marked the beginning of the seventeenth century with two laws, both of which severely aggravated the relations between Venice and Rome. The first made it more difficult for ecclesiastics to buy or inherit property from laity, the second banned the construction of new churches in Venetian territory unless permitted by the senate. Upon his election to the papacy as Paul V in 1605 Camillo Borghese (1552–1621) assumed a portentously rigid stance towards the republic of Venice. In late 1605 he sent two letters to the government of the republic, urging it to revoke these laws and to extradite to a spiritual court two clergymen whom they had imprisoned and hoped to process in a temporal court. The Venetians were intransigent and instead of complying with the pope's requests, chose to publish a written justification for their actions. Thus, on 28 January 1606 Sarpi was nominated *consultore in iure*, a legal and theological adviser to the senate.[9] He was requested to write a *consulto* in defence of Venice's legislation, a text on which the senate's answer to the pope would be based. As the spring came and Venetians remained defiant, the pope excommunicated the senate of Venice (Sarpi and other advisers included) and declared the entire territory of *La Serenissima* under the interdict. The crisis of the interdict, during which Sarpi wrote several substantial *consulti*, lasted a year. It ended largely due to the mediation of the French cardinals François de Joyeuse (1562–1615) and Jacques Davy Duperron (1556–1618). Following the interdict crisis relations between Venice and Rome remained as problematic as they had been for centuries: Venice claimed to be the most obedient daughter of the Church of Rome and at the same time continued its political flirtation and trade with Protestant powers. The papacy, while it sought hard to believe the Venetians' pledges of obedience, was nevertheless tormented with suspicion and showed itself fearful of being ridiculed in the eyes of an increasingly secular world. The fact that Venice expelled the Jesuits from its territory in 1606 and did not allow their return until 1656 is a further indication of the republic's difficult relations with Rome.[10]

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7 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1321.

8 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1312; Da Pozzo 1968, p. 89.

9 Cozzi 1979, p. 67; Da Pozzo 1968, p. 90; Vivanti 2005, p. 65.

10 For the interdict, see the discussion here in chapter 7 on sovereignty, obedience and absolutism.

On 5 October 1607, that is, almost half a year after the resolution of the interdict crisis, Sarpi was attacked by five assassins who fled to the house of the nuncio and subsequently to Rome. Sarpi was stabbed with a dagger, but he recovered and—according to Micanzio—made the twelve medics gathered in his room laugh when he remarked that the wound in his face had been made "*stilo Romanae Curiae*".[11] By now Sarpi had become a major figure in Europe. This was illustrated by the declaration of Henry IV of France to the nuncio of Paris that the attempt to assassinate Sarpi had caused great damage to Catholicism. Despite this authoritative statement, by the end of 1608 at least two further attempts were made on Sarpi's life.[12] After having recovered from the knife attack Sarpi nevertheless continued his work as state theologian and canonist. He wrote *consulti* on various problems ranging from censorship to ecclesiastical benefices, as well as histories. His history of the interdict was finished as early as December 1607. His history of the council of Trent, Sarpi's most famous work, was completed in 1617–1618 and published in London in 1619. During the first few years after the interdict Sarpi immersed himself further in the European republic of letters. He had a particularly vibrant correspondence with French Gallicans such as Jacques Leschassier (1550–1625) and Jacques Gillot (1550–1619), both of whom worked as jurists for the parlement of Paris.

Throughout his life Sarpi suffered from physical weakness and various sicknesses, so much so, that—as Micanzio put it—"he was never persuaded to expect to live one more year".[13] Towards the end of 1622 Sarpi's condition became notably worse and, finally, on 15 January he died of consumption. He wrote his last *consulto* the day before, on his deathbed. To the friends who tried to advise him to save his strength Sarpi replied that his duty was "to serve, not to live".[14] This response is indicative of how Sarpi both fashioned himself and lived his life: he saw himself as an instrument at the service of higher forces. After his death the senate of Venice wanted to honour its loyal servant with a monument, but since this was likely to cause a new clash with Rome, a statue of Sarpi was erected only in 1892. It now stands on the small square of S. Fosca, a few metres from the bridge where assassins made the attempt on his life in 1607.

Sarpi continued to provoke controversy—especially in relation to the papacy—after his death. Pope Gregory XV (1621–1623) fell into "frenzy of rage"

11 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1348–1354. *Stilum* means both dagger and the style of doing something.

12 Bouwsma 1968, pp. 490–494.

13 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1288: "*mai fu persuaso di poter viver un anno*".

14 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1398.

after having heard about the plans to build a monument to Sarpi, and, few months later his successor Urban VIII (1623–1644) forbade the project outright. The fact that Sarpi was buried in the Servite church in Venice proved to be of further irritation to the pope. In January 1624 the new nuncio in Venice informed the senate about the pope's feelings, observing "our Lord" cannot tolerate "that Fra Paolo should live in his sepulcher". The Servite friars took action and transferred Sarpi's remains to within the walls of their monastery. Later in the same year, when they considered it safe enough, the Servites restored Sarpi to the church, inside an altar. When this altar was restored in 1722, Sarpi's skeleton was found and identified by the wound-marks in his skull, and a monumental urn was built for his remains. Twenty years later Sarpi's body was again hidden from the enraged advocates of the papacy, but it was soon returned in the church. In 1828 there was a further attempt to "scatter for ever the ashes of Fra Paolo", but, again, his remains were saved by his admirers. Sarpi's restless body was then placed—ironically—in the premises of the papal seminary, then in a private house, after which it was moved to the library of St. Mark's in the doge's palace, and, finally, to the church in San Michele, the cemetery island of Venice. In 1841 pope Gregory XVI (1831–1846), who had spent his youth as a monk on the very island of San Michele, was informed about Sarpi's tomb. He gave audience to two Venetian noblemen, telling them that "they had defiled and contaminated" his church and that it was necessary to "take him (Sarpi) up, and cast him amongst the common bones, that his memory may perish eternally". The Venetians refused to do this. Five years later the monks of San Michele, obeying the orders of the patriarch of Venice, tried to realize the pope's will. However, Sarpi's stone coffin, clasped with metal bands, proved too strong for them to open and they had to content themselves with merely removing the marble slab that indicated the tomb with an inscription. The slab was reproduced afterwards and, apparently, Sarpi has rested in peace ever since.[15]

15 Robertson 1893, pp. 159–165, 167–172. Unfortunately, Robertson does not provide any footnotes. All the quotations I have taken from him, were already quoted by him from unrevealed sources. One of Robertson's sources may have been Cicogna 1824, vol. I, pp. 91–92, which provides—for example—the inscription of the marble slab that indicated Sarpi's tomb.

The Myth of Venice

Early-modern Venetians identified themselves as citizens of a free, tolerant and peaceful republic. A key element of this myth was the argument that Venice's republican form of government was ideal and conducive to long-lasting peace and harmony. Sarpi—while insisting on Venice's absolute independence from any external authority—showed no interest in the republican aspect of the myth of Venice (this lends further support to my claim that Sarpi was no republican, but a staunch advocate of absolutism).

Medieval and early-modern political writers did not fail to ascribe mixed government to the republic of Venice and, typically, they did this in promotion of the myth of Venice as a stable, peaceful republic. Debates on the best form of government were stimulated by the thirteenth-century Latin translations of Aristotle who, while listing three different governmental systems in his *Politics*—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—also mentioned so-called mixed government, which contained elements of all three simple forms of government. Henry of Rimini, for example, observed in the beginning of the fourteenth century that of all the governments of his time, there was one that was closer to the perfection than the others: "amongst the Christian polities of our time, the polity of the Venetians seems to come close to this ideal of mixed government".[16] Civil society was generally expected to guarantee peaceful life for its citizens. According to Henry of Rimini Venice had achieved this: "the people of Venice enjoy so much peace and tranquility . . . all kinds of homicides and even sheddings of human blood either do not occur there or else they take place only rarely". Quentin Skinner has remarked that these lines were the beginning of "one of the most potent myths of Renaissance political thought, the myth of Venice as the *Serenissima*".[17]

Later, a long line of Venetian writers divulged the myth of Venice as *la Serenissima*, the most serene republic. This mythologizing was chiefly the work of historians like Andrea Dandolo, Bernardo Giustiniani, Pietro Giustiniani, Agostino Valier, Paolo Paruta, Andrea Morosini, Giovanni Nicolò Doglioni and

16 Skinner 1988, p. 399, note 47: "*inter politias nostris temporibus in populo christiano fuerunt politia gentis Venetorum ad hoc regimen mixtum videtur appropinguare*". See also, Skinner 2002, vol. II, pp. 32–35.

17 Skinner 1988, p. 399, note 50: "*Venetorum gens tanta pace et securitate fruitur . . . omnia homicidia vel humani sanguis effusiones aut nunquam aut raro ibi adiuntur*". In contrast to Skinner's remark, Gaeta 1961, pp. 60, 63, argues that no political use of the myth of Venice took place prior to 1509.

Nicolò Contarini.[18] However, it was by no means only the Venetians themselves who promulgated the myth. In his *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* Jean Bodin described the joy of arriving in Venice, where strangers are received hospitably, and where one can live with "the greatest freedom". Furthermore,

> whereas the other cities and districts are threatened by civil wars or fear of tyrants or harsh exactions of taxes or the most annoying inquiries into one's activities, this seemed to me to be nearly the only city that offers immunity and freedom from all these kinds of servitude. This is the reason why people come here from everywhere, wishing to spend their lives in the greatest freedom and tranquility of spirit, whether they are interested in commerce or crafts or leisure pursuits as befits free man.[19]

More often than not, the myth of Venice was employed for political purposes. Sir Henry Wotton (1568–1639), the English ambassador to Venice in 1604–1612 and again in 1616–1619 and 1621–1623, was keen to aggravate the rift between Venice and Rome in the hope of converting Venetians to Protestantism. Wotton constantly reminded Venetian patricians of their past glory and independence from the papacy. For example, assuming the role of an unbiased observer of the history of the world, Wotton animated his patrician hosts by asserting that Venice, "for antiquity, nobility, power, prudence, wisdom and marvel of its government, is the greatest and most glorious Republic the world has ever seen".[20] Wotton's eagerness to praise Venice was nevertheless not just an artful stratagem to influence the leaders of the republic, as we can judge from a letter he wrote to Lord Zouche already in 1592. Writing from Florence Wotton concluded that "I live here in a paradise inhabited with devils. Venice hath scarce heard of those vices which are here practiced".[21] This early comment on the piety of Venetians suggests that Wotton was genuinely charmed by the republic.

The most cogent contributions to the myth of Venice were nevertheless of Venetian origin and during the sixteenth century the most important pieces

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18 Crouzet-Pavan 1999, p. 253; Bouwsma 1968, pp. 54–56, 91–93, 194–199, 270, 557–563.

19 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 3. See also p. 467 (interestingly, Faltenbacher 1993 and Wootton 2002 have questioned the authorship of Bodin with regard to the *Heptaplomeres*). See also Bouwsma 1968, pp. 89–91, 153–160, for Marc'Antonio Sabellico's and Donato Giannoti's promotion of Venice as a free, independent and perfectly governed republic.

20 Ord 2007, p. 9.

21 Bouwsma 1968, p. 268.

of such rhetoric were composed by Gasparo Contarini and Paolo Paruta.[22] Contarini (1483–1542), a diplomat and cardinal, acknowledged that there had been many republics greater in size or in military achievements than the republic of Venice, but none that would have surpassed Venice "with regard to the institutions and laws, adapted to good and happy living". The republic of Venice excelled every other republic in duration, because of the wisdom, diligence, virtue and patriotism of the ancestors, who worked for the *Serenissima* "without the least respect to self-interest and honour".[23] Paolo Paruta (1540–1598), a historian, diplomat and politician, echoed Contarini's praises. He too minimized the importance of the physical size of an empire or a state, arguing that the true perfection of a state was located in its "proper form of government, through which the citizens, living in peace and union, can operate virtuously and achieve civil happiness".[24] Most writers who promoted the myth of Venice identified the pinnacle of the myth with Venice's mixed government, which they saw as a guarantee of the republic's longevity and internal tranquility.

Giovanni Maria Memmo (1509–1579), another distinguished Venetian patrician, noted that the "happiness of a republic" was not based on the "greatness of the empire and state, but on living tranquilly in union", and in this, Memmo concluded, Venice outshone all the ancient and modern republics.[25] Such sentiments reflected Venetian sensitivity regarding the size of their republic. Venice's territory had been reduced following the 1509 defeat to the French troops at the battle of Agnadello. One of the major battles during the war waged by France and the papacy (so-called League of Cambrai) against Venice, Agnadello put an end to the republic's expansionistic politics and forced its

22 For Contarini and Paruta as promoters of the myth of Venice, see Benzoni 2006, pp. 7–12. For Contarini, see Bouwsma 1968, pp. 144–153; Peltonen 2004, pp. 106–110. For Paruta, see Bouwsma 1968, *passim*; Baiocchi 1975–1976; Cozzi 1962.

23 Contarini, *Republica*, p. 10: "per institutione, & legge accomodate à bene, & felicemente vivere"; "*senza havere un minimo rispetto dell'utilità privata, & dello honore*".

24 Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, p. 2: "*dritta forma del governo, per cui vivendo i Cittadini in pace, & unione, ponno virtuosamente operare, & conseguirne la civile felicità*". On p. 377 Paruta maintains that Venice was founded by excellent laws and orders, *"con ottime leggi, & ordini instituita*". He was even more straightforward in his *Historia venetiana*, p. 1: "*La Republica de' Vinetiani per la lunga continovatione del suo imperio, & per l'eccellenza del governo, meritamente viene reputata la più fortunata, & la più bella di quante altre habbia mai havuto il Mondo*" ("the republic of the Venetians, for the long continuation of its empire, and for the excellence of government, is rightly considered to be the most fortunate and the most beautiful of all the others that have ever existed in the world").

25 Memmo, *Dialogo*, p. 96: "*io non giudico che la felicità di una Republica consista nella grandezza dello imperio & dello stato, ma nel vivere quieto in unione*".

government to adopt a policy of isolation and passivity. In this new political situation consolation was to be found from treatises such as Contarini's *De magistratibus et republica Venetorum*, written in 1520s and the early 1530s, but first published in 1543.[26] At times the need to embolden fellow citizens could lead to conceit: Memmo for example declared that no other modern republic merited the name 'republic' and proclaimed Venice "the mirror and the norm for all others".[27]

While the battle of Agnadello cast Venetians to the political periphery, the battle of Lepanto facilitated their return to the limelight of international politics. In 1571, together with allied Christian forces from Spain, Germany and Italy, Venetians defeated the Ottoman army of Ali Pasha in a conflict, which captivated Europe's attentions. Sarpi, Nicolò Contarini (1553–1631) and Andrea Morosini (1558–1618) were adolescents at the time the news of victory reached Venice and Leonardo Donà (1536–1612), the leader of the anticlerical party (*giovani*) and the doge of the interdict period, was in his mid-thirties. It was crucial for the shift in Venice's foreign policy that ten years after Lepanto these young Venetians gained the majority in the *Maggior Consiglio*, the governmental organ, which possessed the right to elect members to smaller councils. The subsequent clash with Rome would never have happened without the rise to power of the *giovani* and without their vigorous patriotic pride and self-assurance reflected by their interpretation of the outcome of the battle of Lepanto as a rehabilitation of Venice's past glory.[28] The political objectives of this proud and patriotic group of Venetian patricians were based on the idea of Venice's absolute freedom from the pope's and the clergy's temporal authority. Not surprisingly, Sarpi soon became their trusted spokesman.[29]

The famous historian and politician Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540) acknowledged a counter-myth of Venice, which highlighted the city-state's imperialism, factionalism and corruption. This attitude reflects the fact that Guicciardini's native country, Florence, numbered amongst the allied forces of the league of Cambrai, which campaigned against Venice. Not surprisingly, Guicciardini argued that in spite of the propitious guidance of God, unbridled

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26 Gilbert 1967, p. 177.

27 Memmo, *Dialogo*, p. 7: "*le altre* (*republiche moderne*) *non meritano esser dette Republiche* . . . (*la republica*) *Vinitiana* . . . *è degna di esser connumerata tra le prime Republiche del mondo*"; p. 57: "*specchio & norma di tutte le altre*".

28 For the impact on Venetians of the battles of Agnadello and Lepanto, see Bouwsma 1968, pp. 108–109, 162–163, 193, 230–231; Cozzi 1995, pp. 251, 309–310. For the celebration of the victory at Lepanto in Venice, see Fenlon 2007, *passim*.

29 For *giovani*, see Cozzi 1995, *passim*; Bouwsma 1968, pp. 193, 226–260; Wootton 1983, p. 47.

hubris, self-interest and the delusion of Venetian patricians left the republic at the mercy of fortune and that the activities of these patricians triggered the calamities that fell on Italy in the form of French invasion.[30] Indeed, it has been noted that alongside the myth of "magnanimous, heroic, generous, liberal, powerful Venice" there was always the counter-myth of a Venice that was "miserable, vile, avid, tyrannical" and "stupidly arrogant in its impotence".[31]

Accusations of hubris and arrogance were relatively easy to bear. The criticism of the French political writer Jean Bodin (1530–1596), however, was aimed at the very core of the myth of Venice as a haven for civic freedom. In Bodin's ranking, *La Serenissima* held a lower place in comparison with the ancient cities and empires. According to him Venice could not outshine the ancients as far as force, temperance, justice, moderation and artistic gifts were concerned. Moreover, while freedom was one of the key elements in the myth of Venice, in his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (1566) Bodin argued that in Venice freedom had grown excessive and even harmful. At the same time, in the *Les Six livres de la République* (1576) he acknowledged that Venice was never tyrannical and that the electoral system of Venetian magistrates guaranteed a certain harmony to the government so that it flourished and was stable and longlasting.[32] However, while Contarini and Paruta claimed that Venice had conserved its freedom for more than a thousand years, and this was because of its eccellent mixed government, Bodin remarked that it is "not above foure hundred yeares, that they (Venetians) have instituted this forme of Commonweale, neither could they avoid many seditions and civill warres". The French thinker also noted that before the year 1175 Venice "was a meere Monarchy", while by the sixteenth century it had already changed into "a pure Aristocrazie". Bodin was as such amazed by Contarini's argument that Venice was ruled by a mixed government.[33] Sarpi was no doubt familiar with Bodin's political thought, although there are no direct references to the latter in Sarpi's own writings. It has been suggested that Sarpi never mentions Bodin precisely because of Bodin's criticism of Venice.[34] As an adviser to the

30 Finlay 1999, pp. 294–297, 317–318.

31 Fasoli 1958, p. 449.

32 Vasoli 2001, pp. 117–120, 122–123.

33 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. II, chap. I, p. 190; bk. VI, chap. IV, pp. 711–712; Contarini, *Republica*, p. 9: "*quasi per mille, & cento anni la Città di Vinegia s'è conservata libera dalla violentia degli inimici*"; Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, p. 467: "(Venezia) *nata in libertà già per spatio di più di mille, et tanti anni, con stupendo, & unico essempio la haveva conservata*"; Vasoli 2001, pp. 120–121.

34 Cozzi 1969, p. 482.

senate it was Sarpi's duty to defend *La Serenissima* and any criticism targeted against Venice would have infringed upon this objective. The critique leveled by Bodin, however, focused on the myth of civic freedom in Venice. This was an idea that Sarpi showed little interest in. His political theory was based on the concept of obedience rather than freedom and was opposed to the republican idea of civic liberty. I believe it was not because Sarpi would have disapproved of Bodin's criticism of Venice that he never mentions the latter's name in his writings, but because Sarpi may have agreed with the French to a larger extent than was comfortable to admit in public. Bodin was, after all, a forbidden writer whose major works were placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*.

A key argument of the myth of Venice was that Venice's political system, which was based on mixed government, made it a perfectly united republic. Contarini maintained that the patricians were the "eyes of the city" and that their regard was not only for themselves, but for every Venetian. As a result of the patricians' altruism all Venetians lived "most happily" and the other "members" obeyed "with great pleasure these eyes".[35] Sarpi too emphasized the importance of unity and obedience. In his history of the interdict he praised the patricians for their unanimity and the subjects for their voluntary observance of the orders given by the government: "the senate was most united in its decisions; and the cities and the people remained very peacefully in obedience".[36] The mixed-government was supposed to guarantee peace, harmony and an active civic life that encompassed a greater number of citizens than for example, a monarchy. The concept is associated with republicanism and it has been suggested that Sarpi had sympathies for an aristocratic-republican form of government.[37] It is nevertheless difficult to see the Venice of the very early years of the seventeenth century as an asylum for classical republicanism, as John Pocock has observed: "the atmosphere of Venice", Pocock maintains, "was too heavily senatorial for passionate asseverations of an ideal of active citizenship".[38]

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35 Contarini, *Republica*, p. 154: "*occhi della città . . . vivono felicissimamente . . . ubbidiscano di bonissima voglia à questi occhi*".

36 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 228: "*il senato era unitissimo nelle deliberazioni; e le città e popoli si conservorono quietissimi nell'obedienza*".

37 Ulianich 1958, p. 430, claims that Sarpi had "*simpatie per un governo aristocratico-democratico*". Bouwsma 1968, *passim*, argues that Sarpi was a defender of republican values. Grubb 1986, p. 54, in turn argues that Sarpi was not a republican.

38 Pocock 2003, p. 64. Gilmore 1973, p. 431 remarks that in Venice only patricians had citizenship, although (*ibid*., p. 441) original citizens too could participate to a certain extent. Sarpi was from his mother's side an original citizen, that is, a member of an old Venetian

Writers like Contarini, Memmo and Paruta believed that Venice's stability and apparent immunity to revolution derived from the good laws made by the republic's wise forefathers, but recent research has underlined the significance of the corporatist nature of the political and social structure of Venice. Venetians were less individualistic than Florentines, for example. Instead, they identified themselves with the social group to which they belonged, whether it was a cotery of patricians, a *scuola grande*, or a guild.[39] In addition to this kind of corporatism, Venetians' sense of social unity was strengthened by the fact that they were islanders, and, especially during the mid-sixteenth century, politically isolated from the rest of Europe.

Unlike many other Italian city-states, Venice did not have a direct historical connection to ancient Rome. Therefore, echoes of classical cultures remained tenuous and were compounded with gothic, baroque and Byzantine influences.[40] In fact, part of Venice's myth was built on the claim that the city-state had always been free. Memmo acknowledged the fact that Venice did not possess as large a dominion as the ancient republic of Rome, but, he argued, Venice exceeded Rome as far as "union and longevity" were concerned, for it had "already passed more than eleven hundred years in its government and perfect union, having conserved and maintained its intact and incorrupt liberty".[41] Similarly, in a letter to the French advocate Jacques Leschassier Sarpi remarked that "if you say that during the rule of Justinian the republic was subject to his laws" before obtaining freedom, "you offend deeply this nobility", according to whom "their state has never been subject to anyone".[42] It should be stressed that Sarpi was not concerned about republican or civic liberty: his aim was to safeguard the independence of Venice. More specifically, he defended Venice's independence from papal authority by employing the myth of Venice's millennial freedom. If Sarpi ever defended any freedom, it was precisely in this sense that he did it. It is nonetheless interesting that in the letter to Leschassier Sarpi did not express the myth of Venice's long independence as his own understanding of the matter, but referred to it merely as the opinion of Venetian

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family. Bouwsma 1968, p. 59 estimates that approximately ten percent of Venetian population was active in public life. This calculation includes nobility and original citizens.

39 MacKenney 1992, p. 56.

40 MacKenney 1992, pp. 53–54.

41 Memmo, *Dialogo*, p. 7: "*di unione & lunghezza di tempo di gran lunga l'ha superata, havendo . . . già passati mille cento, & più anni in un governo & perfetta unione sua, conservata & mantenuta la sua intatta & incorrotta libertà*".

42 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 8 July 1608, p. 18: "*Quod ais rempublicam Iustiniani imperio subiectam eius legibus vixisse, antequam libera fieret etc., maxime offenderet hanc nobilitatem, quae civitatem suam numquam subiectam alicui fuisse defendit*".

patricians. Clearly, a letter to Leschassier was not the place to promulgate the myth and Sarpi must have understood that the learned Frenchman was well aware of Venice's historical vasallage to the Byzantine empire. However, he showed no such hesitations in his *consulti*, as we can judge from the following quotation: "most wise and religious republic" had for a "thousand and two hundred years governed herself", much to the "amazement and example" for the rest of the world.[43]

As several scholars have pointed out, the myth of Venice is a hybrid. While Gina Fasoli sees the myth as consisting of elements such as political wisdom, moral strength, internal equity and dignified external firmness, Franco Gaeta has distinguished three different myths: the myth of freedom, the myth of mixed government and the myth of longevity, all of which were present in Gasparo Contarini's writings, for instance.[44] The myth of freedom suggests religious freedom and tolerance on the one hand, and political freedom on the other. The latter consists of civic liberty and absolute independence from the jurisdiction and authority of any external political power. According to this line of thought civic liberty was guaranteed by mixed government, while independence from external interference manifested itself in the senate's inviolable and autonomous capacity to make and abrogate laws. These two, freedom and independence, were often regarded as the basis for Venice's longevity. Sarpi was eager to defend Venice's independence, but nothing suggests that he advocated civic liberty. He did cherish the idea of freedom of thought, but only as an inward and suppressed quality. Outwardly he recommended compliance with common opinion and obedience to the sovereign's legislation. This was hardly compatible with such cardinal principles of civic liberty as freedom of expression and general right to participate in decision-making processes.

As far as religious freedom is concerned, Sarpi's activities bespeak consistent tolerance towards different creeds and confessions. He corresponded with several Protestants and conversed with Jews and Calvinists who lived in Venice, actions which brought him in front of the Holy Office already in the 1590s. In general, Sarpi regarded dogmatism and zealous defence of particular religious doctrines with distaste and he ridiculed these positions. At the same time, he was unable to promote religious tolerance in his *consulti* and public writings. To do so would have aggravated the republic's relations with Rome

43 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 74: "*sapientissima e religiosissima republica, che già mille e dugento anni si è governata con stupore ed esempio del mondo*".

44 Fasoli 1958, pp. 447, 454; Gaeta 1961, p. 66: "*In Contarini c'è la somma dei motivi di mitizzazione: libertà originaria, libertà civile, perfezione del meccanismo costituzionale, durata millenaria dello stato*".

and worked against his own argumentation in support for Venice's cause. To this end, Sarpi attempted to appear as pious as possible in order to avoid providing champions of Rome any further material to use against Venice. This is why he openly insisted that Venice had never turned away from the Catholic creed: "it is our most manifest and firm deliberation", he wrote, "to want to remain in the holy Catholic and apostolic faith and in the observance of the holy Church of Rome, like our ancestors have from the origin . . . of this state until now by divine grace continuously observed".[45]

Nowhere in his writings did Sarpi refer to the myth of mixed government. He simply stressed that Venice had been free from the time it was founded. Neither did he claim that Venice should have provided asylum for civic freedom. Instead, he underlined how quiescently its subjects obeyed their ruler. Sarpi did, however, make use of the myth of Venice's independence and freedom from foreign laws and jurisdictions in such a way, which reflected his thoroughly pragmatic interpretation of the needs of Venice and its government. He did not write idealistic panegyrics on his patria, rather he defended Venice with arguments which were supported by historical examples. Often he also chose to attack the enemy instead of contenting himself with defending Venice by explaining, embellishing or hiding its imperfections. It also seems that to panegyrize Venice as a perfect republic would not have been in keeping with Sarpi's pessimistic and sceptical outlook. Indeed, he went as far as to pinpoint flaws in Venetian patricians whom he criticized for juridical unpreparedness and political apathy. Nor was his criticism limited to politics, since he also reproached the backwardness of some professors at the university of Padua.[46] Patricians like Contarini, Memmo and Paruta wrote about a political system which they themselves constituted. In contrast, as a non-aristocratic adviser, Sarpi remained an outsider to the actual political authority. He lacked the status of a full-fledged member of the ruling elite. As such, patricians may have felt a temptation to glorify and embellish their own actions, which in fact were the subject matter of the official historiography of Venice. Sarpi was, in words of Gino Benzoni, more interested in "the stone of the fruit, not the peel" and in

45 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 515: "*essendo manifesta deliberazione nostra fermissima di voler continuare nella santa fede catolica et apostolica e nell'osservanza della santa chiesa romana, sì come li maggiori nostri dal principio . . . di questa città sino al presente per divina grazia hanno continuamente osservato*". See also, Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 221: "*avendo la republica deliberato di perseverare nella santa fede e nell'osservanza verso la chiesa romana, usata dalla republica fino dall'origine della città*".

46 Pin 2001, pp. 36, 90–94.

"the cogency of a command, not the ornament".[47] Indeed, my view is that his motivation was purely intellectual and based on the clash that he envisaged between the interests of the papacy and secular sovereigns.

The closest Sarpi comes to employing the rhetoric of the myth of Venice is in his history of the interdict and in some of his *consulti*. These texts were written with a specific purpose in mind, since they were composed to justify certain laws made by the senate of Venice. Unlike the humanistic eulogies of Contarini, Memmo and Paruta, Sarpi's *consulti* were reactions to concrete political attacks launched by the Roman curia. It is for this reason that he focused more on "the cogency of command" than on its "ornament". However, in his history of the interdict Sarpi touched on issues such as Venice's long-standing freedom, its prosperous government (which he deemed prosperous precisely because of its good laws and practices), and the readiness of Venetians to unitedly defend their republic. He insisted that Venice could not possibly comply with the pope's demands on the eve of the interdict, since this would have harmed "the natural liberty of the republic, given to it by God and conserved with the help of its divine majesty and with the blood of its ancestors for so many centuries". Furthermore, to submit to these demands would have confounded Venice's "entire government", which had prospered independently for so long. All this, Sarpi argued, was resolved by the senate unanimously and communicated to the curia in order to "demonstrate the concord of the republic in the defence of its own liberty".[48]

In a similar vein, in a *consulto* written during the interdict crisis Sarpi proudly declared that, by the grace of God, Venice was born free "during the reigns of Honorius and Teodosius" and had never been "subject to any prince or their laws".[49] In February 1606 Sarpi helped the senate to reply to an imperious letter from the pope and again we can find a reference to Venice's long-standing freedom: Sarpi wrote that the pope's letter threatened "our liberty, which the divine goodness has conserved inviolated for 1200 years amidst innumerable

47 Benzoni 2006, p. 8: "*Al servita interessano il nocciolo, non la buccia, la vigenza del comando, non l'addobbo*".

48 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 183: "*per non pregiudicar alla libertà naturale della republica, datali da Dio e conservata con l'aggiuto della Maestà sua divina e col sangue de' suoi antenati per tanti centenara de' anni; per non confondere tutto il suo governo prosperato con tal legi e muodi sino al presente . . . e questa resoluzione fu presa dal senato con tutti li voti concordi; il che anco fu significato al noncio, e scritto a Roma, per mostrare la concordia della republica nel difendere la sua libertà*".

49 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 501: "*La republica di Vinezia, essendo nata nel tempo dell'imperio di Onorio e Teodosio per grazia di Dio libera, non soggietta ad alcun principe né alle legi loro*".

dangers".[50] In the same text we see a rare example of Sarpi using a panegyrical tone identical to that of Contarini, Memmo and Paruta:

> As to those things that a prince should know in order to be able to govern his republic in the honour of God, for the benefit of the holy church and for the peace and tranquility of the subjects, by the grace and clemency of God we have been sufficiently instructed by the wisdom and examples of our ancestors, having our senate been summoned to this rule by God not recently, but centuries ago, succeeding itself like its parts succeed one another, and thus preserving itself always. And there is no similar example in the past of this divine favour, wherefore it has been admired by the whole world and by the Roman pontiffs too, of whom no one has ever opposed himself to our liberty so gravely and without knowing the cause.[51]

In keeping with the earlier encomia of humanist writers Sarpi emphasized Venice's uniqueness by pointing out that no other republic or state had ever been favoured by God in such manner as Venice. This divine favour manifested itself in Venice's good government and long-standing freedom, which were admired by the entire world and even by the popes. The end of the quotation sets the text in its historical context and implies that in Sarpi's opinion the pope was in fact embarking on a task, which had not only never before been attempted, but which was also most likely to fail. Emphasizing the wisdom and goodness of the senate of Venice and stressing that God's favour was on the side of the Venetians served to discourage the pope and his supporters in their mission.

Notwithstanding Sarpi's pessimism and his propensity to downplay rather than eulogize, Sarpi did upon occasion openly employ some of the traditional features of the myth of Venice. It is, however, significant that Sarpi never used the term 'mixed government', which was, after all, one of the principal

50 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 509: "*la nostra libertà, che la divina bontà ha conservato inviolata da mille e ducent'anni in qua tra innumerabili pericoli*".

51 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 511: "*in quello che pertiene ad un principe sapere per governare la sua republica ad onor de Dio, utilità della santa chiesa e quiete e tranquillità delli soggietti, per grazia e benignità de Dio siamo abastanza instrutti dalla sapienza et esempii de nostri maggiori, essendo il nostro senato stato chiamato da Dio a questo governo non di nuovo, ma già molti secoli, succedendo come a se stesso, così a parte per parte che si conserva il medesimo sempre. E di questo favour divino non vi è simile esempio nelle cose passate, per il che anco è stato ammirato da tutto il mondo, e dalli pontefici romani ancora, nissun de' quali mai così gravamente e senza cognizione della causa s'è opposto alla nostra libertà*".

concepts of the myth. My view is that this omission was rooted in Sarpi's political objectives: while his aim was to advance absolute obedience and further centralization of temporal power, references to mixed government would have linked his texts to the republican agenda of civic liberty. My reading of Sarpi differs from that of Edward Muir, according to whom "Sarpi sculpted the myth of republican liberty into its most evolved ideological form, fashioning an essentially civic and narrowly aristocratic ethic into a manifesto that was adopted by anti-monarchists throughout the western world".[52] Certainly there was a strong ideological motivation that determined Sarpi's political writings, but this ideology was neither republican, nor anti-monarchist. It was, rather, absolutistic and thoroughly shaped by divine right theory, as discussed here in the chapter on sovereignty, obedience and absolutism.

Religious Fervor and Piety in Venice

Venice was amongst the first Italian states to be influenced by the German Reformation in the sense that Luther's writings circulated in the city already around 1520. This does not mean, however, that Venetians would have embraced Lutheranism, but, rather, that they were open-minded towards other confessions. That Venetian publishers produced several editions of a vernacular Bible before the end of the fifteenth century further testifies to an undogmatic atmosphere.[53] Venice's commercial relations with Protestants, Jews, Greeks and Mohammadans and the presence of many foreign students at the university of Padua contributed to a heightened sense of religious tolerance, which was viewed with suspicion in Rome.[54] It was in particular people like Henry Wotton and Sarpi whose ideas troubled the curia. Wotton shared Sarpi's aversion to the Jesuits and publicly referred to the pope as the "bishop of Rome". He observed anxiously how everywhere in Europe Protestants seemed to become overcome by Catholic propaganda and cherished the idea of introducing Protestantism in Italy.[55] Venice, with her reputation for freedom and tolerance, appeared to be the ideal place to commence the mission. It is likely that Wotton looked at Sarpi as a possible means of diffusing his reformist ideas within the Venetian nobility.[56]

52 Muir 1981, p. 33.
53 Martin 1993, p. 26; Coppens & Nuovo 2005, pp. 133–134.
54 Rein 1904, pp. 5–6; Bouswma 1968, p. 127.
55 Smith 1907, pp. 69, 76.
56 Wootton 1983, p. 98.

Wotton was not the first employee of the English embassy to consider Venetians ready for a large-scale reformation. In 1545 Baldassari Aldieri, the secretary of the English ambassador to Venice, observed that the younger senators were so sympathetic to Protestantism that it would soon be possible to "preach the gospel freely" in Venice.[57] Both Aldieri and Wotton were blinded by their own religious zeal and failed to recognize the Venetians' attachment to their Catholic traditions. One clear indication of the Venetians' devotion to their religious conventions appeared in the story of the transportation of the body of St. Luke from Egypt to Venice. The patron saint of Venice gave the republic prestige and sense of piety equal to that of Rome and its patron, St. Paul. The idea of renouncing the centuries-old Catholic identity built around St. Luke was clearly unthinkable to Venetians who took pride in their own traditions and piety.

Philippe Canaye de Fresnes—the French ambassador to Venice and Sarpi's friend—observed that while in the 1570s the atmosphere in the republic had been vicious and libertine two decades later Venetians boasted deeply-rooted values, as well as a rich and vital religiosity with a strong sense of piety and charity. He wrote in 1602 that Venetian clergy was better disciplined and religious services were more impressive than in the 1570s and "everything that can be desired for the consolation of the soul abounds here as much as in any city in Christendom".[58] At the same time, De Fresnes lamented the lack of cultural life, philosophy and contacts with Venetian patricians whom he found cold, phlegmatic and arrogant. There were exceptions, nevertheless, and the French refers to Leonardo Donà, Pietro Duodo and Jacopo Barozzi, whose proud and patriotic stance in relation to the papacy delighted him. Sarpi, a man capable of providing him with the philosophical conversations he was lacking, became one of his friends.[59] That a man as concerned about religion as Canaye de Fresnes would befriend Sarpi clashes with the argument that the latter was an atheist and lends further support to my view of Sarpi's religiosity.

No reformation took place in Venice, neither with nor without the support of the government. A reformation with official support has sometimes been referred to as "magisterial reformation", while one without any governmental backing has been labeled "radical reformation".[60] Venetian patricians

57 Stella 1964, p. 3: "*In Venedig sind die jungeren senatoren so fil des Evangelii verstendig und begirig, das man gute hoffnung hat, man werde des orts bald das Evangelion frei predigen lassen*".

58 Cozzi 1979, p. 21; Bouwsma 1968, p. 268.

59 Cozzi 1979, pp. 21–23.

60 Guggisberg 1996, p. 80.

stood firmly against religious changes in their dominion and nothing suggests that their subjects would have thought differently.[61] It has nevertheless been suggested—mistakenly, I believe—that Sarpi was in favour of Protestant reformation in Venice and elsewhere in Italy, because he considered Protestants an effective counter-force to the papacy.[62] Although Sarpi was critical of the papacy, it is not plausible that he would have given his support to this kind of a reformation in Venice. Such a radical change would have been against his fundamentally conservative outlook, which was instinctively opposed to any novelty. "That which has been successful in the past", Sarpi wrote, "should always be kept and observed: nothing makes a government perish like the changing of the ways of running it; to open new and unused ways means exposing oneself to grave perils".[63] Despite his customary aversion to change, however, Sarpi had no such qualms as far as the papacy was concerned. Indeed, as will become clear, he eagerly promoted a reform in church government and church-state relations.

Paradoxically, Venetians fostered at one and the same time proud independence from and pronounced reverence for the Church of Rome. The idea of independence was often bolstered by references to the Gallican church and its relatively independent position vis à vis Rome. Yet Venetians also demonstrated deferential adherence to Roman Catholicism and often displayed profound distaste for change, especially where religion was concerned. Venetian nobility was at the same time tolerant of new ideas and keen to preserve those things which they considered essential for maintaining the social and political status quo. This sort of conservatism was undoubtedly intensified by a marked respect for *mores maiorum*, the ancient customs and laws laid down by the revered founders of the republic. At the same time, early sixteenth-century Europe witnessed increased enthusiasm for spirituality and religious reform, together with an aspiration to revive the gospel in its original form. Gasparo Contarini, the Benedictines of San Giorgio Maggiore, the oratory of Santa Giustina in Padua and the Bishopry of Giovan Matteo Giberti in Verona were instrumental in promoting such a renewed religious fervour in the territory of Venice. The publication and huge success of works such as Thomas à Kempis'

61 See, for example, Pin 2006b, p. 365.

62 Salvatorelli 1953, p. 312.

63 Sarpi, *Istoria del concilio di Trento* (Gambarin edition), vol. I, p. 43: "*quello che per il passato è riuscito, doversi tenere et osservar sempre: nissuna cosa far perire un governo maggiormente che il mutar i modi di reggerlo; l'aprire vie nuove e non usate esser un esporsi a gravi pericoli*".

De imitatione Christi in 1543 offers further indication of the new energy for religion.[64]

There was a tangible religious ardour in Venice throughout the sixteenth century and elements of this enthusiasm continued in the early decades of the following century. Writing in the 1590s, the former Jesuit Giovanni Botero praised the piety of Venetians:

> there is no place where the churches are more used, the sermons more frequented, sacred persons more respected, divine worship celebrated with more magnificence, feast days celebrated with more honor.[65]

A decade later, a pseudonym Wolfgang Hoffman found Venetian nobility "religious, very sincere, and of most Christian disposition".[66] The fact that three authorities so different in their background as Canaye de Fresnes, Botero and Hoffman could all conclude that Venice was an outstandingly pious and devout city-state suggests that the contemporary accusations of Venetians' heresy and impiety launched by the defenders of the papacy were ill-placed or politically motivated. In particular, the polemic writings published during the interdict crisis can tell us very little about the actual state of piety in Venice. The root of the rift between Venice and Rome was political, not religious, and at stake were jurisdictional and economic interests.

Information and Censorship

Early-modern Venice has often been referred to as a centre of information.[67] This interpretation of Venice is further supported by the fact that Sarpi was exceptionally well informed about international politics. He enjoyed a wide correspondence with European erudites and became acquainted with numerous foreigners who visited or lived in Venice. Typically, he met these foreigners in the *Nave d'oro*, a shop owned by the Dutch Calvinist Gerhard Nis. Here Sarpi conversed with Pierre Asselineau, a French Calvinist residing in Venice. He also met foreign merchants and, according to Micanzio, people who had

64 Ulianich 1986, pp. 50–52.

65 Bouwsma 1968, p. 268.

66 Hoffman, *Avvertimento*, p. 6: "*sono tutti Senatori principali . . . religiosi, sincerissimi, e di Christianissima mente*".

67 Burke 2000, pp. 397, 406; De Vivo 2007, *passim*; Preto 2010, pp. 87–88.

travelled "not only in Europe, but in East and West Indies as well".[68] Foreigners and Venetian sailors provided Sarpi and his fellow citizens with firsthand descriptions of natural, religious and political conditions in a wide range of places around the known world. Being exposed to this sort of information no doubt contributed to the development of Sarpi's profoundly relativistic worldview. The vivid accounts presented by these travelers contradicted many geographic facts that he had learned from Aristotle and other such sources.

One of Sarpi's most important foreign contacts was William Bedell, the chaplain of Henry Wotton. Except for official audiences, foreign ambassadors were strictly forbidden to meet Venetian magistrates, which is why Wotton used Bedell as his agent.[69] In the autumn of 1607 Wotton wrote to Sir Robert Cecil that Sarpi was

> a sound Protestant . . . which I affirm unto your Lordship . . . upon assurance thereof given me by my chaplain, who hath sounded him in the principal points of our religion. By him I deal with him for less observation in diverse things of importance, and they spend upon agreement together every week almost one half-day.[70]

These meetings were held under the pretence that Bedell taught English to Sarpi and Micanzio, but it is evident that the "diverse things of importance" referred to religious and political matters rather than to the intricacies of English grammar. This is confirmed by the fact that Sarpi had not learnt English by 16 February 1610, that is, approximately three years after these "studies" commenced. On that particular day he wrote to Jérôme Groslot de l'Isle, a French Huguenot, that he could communicate with a certain Englishman only through an interpreter.[71]

Although not being able to converse freely with Wotton, Sarpi clearly felt amicable towards him. When the ambassador had been suffering a fever, Sarpi wrote to Christoph von Dohna and lamented the fact that he could not pay a visit.[72] Wotton himself said that he had talked with Sarpi only once, although the pope's spies claimed that the two men had often met in the *Nave d'Oro*.

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68 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1306: "*alla Nave d'Oro . . . tra' quali il buon Perrot francese . . . anco molti mercanti stranieri, e tali ch'erano stati non solo per l'Europa, ma nell'Indie Orientali et Occidentali*".

69 Wootton 1983, pp. 9, 41, 93–94, 98.

70 Wotton, *Letters*, Vol. I, p. 399.

71 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 111; See also, Smith 1907, pp. 55–56, 69, 76.

72 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, 3 March 1609, p. 142: "*mi duole non poterlo visitare*".

Pope Paul V also believed that Wotton had hosted Sarpi and other Catholic theologians in his residence. In addition, according to the pope, Wotton had written a treatise in which he claimed that Protestant sermons were being held in Venice. The senate denied these accusations repeatedly and claimed that Wotton led a peaceful life in his residence and had no interest at all in religious instigation.[73]

The court of Rome regarded Venice with suspicion not only because of the great number of resident foreigners who confessed different religions,[74] but also because of the free circulation of books in the territory of the republic. The Holy Office confiscated prohibited books whenever this was possible, but the methods for tracing such items and for checking their importation were defective. As to books not yet prohibited by Rome, the inquisitors were powerless. Furthermore, the decision to prohibit a book in Venice had to be made in cooperation with the local Congregation of the Holy Office, which consisted of nuncio, inquisitor, patriarch and three Venetian patricians.[75] This arrangement made it impossible for the inquisition simply to dictate their will on censorship issues. However, Venetians were usually reluctant to provoke superfluous quarrels with the pope and tended to comply with the inquisitor's will.

Censorship was not limited to politically controversial writers like Niccolò Machiavelli and Jean Bodin. Certain scientific writers were equally considered a menace to religious doctrines and the church. The point at which a book became censored sometimes seems surprising. The Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium celestium*, first published in 1543, was prohibited by the Congregation of the Index only in 1616, after more than seventy years of free circulation. Sarpi, a close friend of Galileo's and an adherent of Copernican cosmology, suddenly found himself compelled to overlook his scientific convictions for the good of the republic. When, in 1616, Rome asked the government of Venice to publish a ban on Copernicus' work,[76] the senate sought advice from Sarpi who replied with a *consulto* in which he recommended acquiescing to the will of the court of Rome. It might seem odd that Sarpi recommended the prohibition of Copernicus' main work, but he knew well that those who were interested in Copernicus' ideas had already read the book and possibly even procured a copy of it for themselves (at least

73 Smith 1907, pp. 87, 95–97.

74 For example, according to Ravid 2001, p. 3, there were thirteen hundred Jews living in Venice in the 1550s. On religious diversity in Venice in general, see Martin 1993, p. 28 and *passim*.

75 Savio 1955, p. 72.

76 Infelise 1999, pp. 56, 68.

Sarpi had one), and that to take a stand against the pope on such trifling a matter would have weakened Venice's position in negotiations over much more serious issues. After all, as Sarpi remarked, hardly anyone read the book in the first place.[77]

In spite of such minor concession to papal censorship, Venice continued to provide a forum for the circulation and discussion of what in Rome was considered suspicious literature. Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1576–1633) complained that the Venetian publishing house Meietti continued to print books "containing heresies, impieties, and all sorts of errors", and, on top of this, "the worst books of German, English and French heretics" were being imported to Venice.[78] Books were packed in closed boxes and when an inquisitor wanted to inspect a new consignment, booksellers either claimed that it should not be opened since the books might get damaged, or, if necessary, they appealed to the senate, which could in turn order the case to be sent unopened to Venice. The only effective way for the inquisition to check the flow of books was to do so before they arrived in the Venetian territory. This was necessary also because foreign ambassadors were safe from the jurisdiction of the inquisition. Henry Wotton, for example, received books which the nuncio described "wicked" and—consequently—urged the government to take action against such activity, although Venetians considered the idea of a violation of diplomatic immunity harmful to their foreign policy and refused to put pressure on the English ambassador. The doge announced that "it was not convenient" that the inquisitors should "examine or prohibit" a book received by Wotton, because this kind of disrespect to "ministers of princes" meant "violating the *ius gentium*". In addition to this, it was impossible to confiscate any book owned by a patrician and, in general, Venetian nobility ignored prohibitions from Rome whenever they thought that a book dealt with matters related to the reason of state.[79]

In 1609 the nuncio wrote to Cardinal Borghese that there was in Venice "a great number of prohibited books available to anyone who wants them". There was no remedy for this situation, because of the "great liberty that these gentlemen want to have here in these and other matters too". The nuncio could warn booksellers, but as to patricians and their followers there was nothing to be

77 Sarpi, *Opere*, pp. 603–605.

78 Savio 1955, p. 75: "*continentes haereses, impietates, ac diversi generis errores*", p. 73: "*I peggiori libri degl'heretici di Germania, d'Inghilterra et di Francia*".

79 Savio 1955, pp. 76–77, 80–81, 79: "*se fra le sue robe gli era venuto qualche libro, non era conveniente, che essi lo cercassero, o prohibissero, che saria un violare* jus gentium, *quando non si portasse rispetto a ministri de principi*". See also, Grendler 1978.

done, "for neither Cicero, nor Demosthenes could persuade them".[80] If we are to believe the Jesuit diplomat and theologian Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), Venetians' attitude towards prohibited books changed drastically at the turn of the sixteenth century. While still in the previous century Venetians had respected papal prohibitions and censorship, from the interdict period onwards prohibited books streamed in from Germany and "Aretine, Machiavelli and similar books have kept spreading secretely to anyone who has ordered them".[81]

At least to a certain extent, Sarpi was held responsible for the Venetians' disregard for papal censorship. Whereas "books of sane theology" were continuously printed in Spain, France, Germany, and previously in Venice too, this material was "castrated by fra Paolo the Servite", so that these "mutilated" books threatened to erase the "light of truth" and the "proper obedience to the church of God".[82] As late as 1609 the nuncio argued that Sarpi vilified the papal censorship. In Sarpi's view, the nuncio claimed, books were prohibited in Rome solely "on grounds of affections and passions", and therefore these bans were "not to be observed or feared". What was more, the major part of the nobility shared this attitude.[83] While Roman censorship was particularly sensitive to anti-papal and anti-Catholic writings, Venetians were keen to censore texts which were considered prejudicial to temporal authority. Treatises which supported the papacy often offended Venetians, while texts written in defence of secular authorities were likely to upset the papacy. There was an inevitable clash of interests between the inquisition of Venice and the anti-clerical faction of patricians with regard to censorship and the promotion of partisan literature.

As the case of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium celestium* demonstrates, Sarpi was part of the Venetian censorship machinery. This is hardly surprising, given his integral role in the republic's decision-making process and his

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80 Savio 1955, p. 83: "*che in Venetia ci sian gran quantità di libri prohibiti et che gli habbia chi gli vuole. Et per la grande libertà che in questa, et ancora in altre cose vogliono questi signori che qui sia, io credo che in questo tempo non vi sia rimedio . . . con li nobili, et anco con gli altri che gli hanno non ci si può fare cosa alcuna*", p. 88: "*né anco Cicerone, et Demostene gli persoaderieno*".

81 Possevino, *Risposta*, p. 6: "*Aretino, Machiavelli & simili libri che sotto mano ha continuato di spargere a qualunque ne dimandava*".

82 Possevino, *Risposta*, p. 57: "*I libri di sana Teologia . . . sono da due anni in qua stati castrati da Fra Paolo Servita . . . & mandati fuori colle parti mutilate, acciò che si togliesse la luce della verità, & della dovuta ubidienza alla chiesa di Dio*".

83 Savio 1955, p. 83: "*frate Paolo servita sparla in questa materia con dire che le prohibitioni de libri si fanno in Roma per affetti, et passioni, et che non si hanno da osservare o temere. Et questo senso credo che habbia gran parte della nobiltà di Venetia*".

special task to thwart legal and polemical offensives launched against Venice. His defensive tactics are revealed in a *consulto*, which considered "slanderous antigovernmental writings" a serious threat to any state. In the *consulto* Sarpi admitted that there were flaws in every government and that it was difficult to defend or hide these imperfections. Since making excuses for them would only equal to acknowledging a failure, he recommended a swift counter-attack instead. This is what the Jesuits did, Sarpi claimed, and encouraged the senate of Venice to emulate the adversary's successful strategy of demonstrating that the imperfections of the accuser were in fact greater than those of the accused. Such reasoning dictated that the "bad opinion" propagated by the enemy would "miraculously" find a new target as the reader would become informed of the accuser's underlying maliciousness. The *consulto* was built on a psychological insight about human nature, according to which man was susceptible to uncritically accepting and spreading accusations directed at a third party. The target was chosen on grounds of the amount of "vice" so that the public's hatred was always focused on the victim considered most vicious. In the end, Sarpi saw propaganda in terms of warfare and recommended a total ban on all antigovernmental writing. This evokes an image very different from Sarpi the defender of freedom of speech portrayed by John Milton.[84] Milton himself was an enthusiastic defender of freedom and read Sarpi's history of the council of Trent as a critique of the suppressive aspects of the Counter-Reformation papacy. At the same time, Milton failed to see that Sarpi allowed the interest of the state to overrule all the rights and liberties of the subjects.

Education and 'vita civile'

Sarpi's Venetian birthplace guaranteed him an excellent scientific training. This was the case not only in terms of university education, but also with regard to the different academies and semi-formal circles within which the learned aristocracy of sixteenth-century Venice held their scientific discussions and perfected their erudition. Venice was teeming with such coteries which were organized by members of the aristocracy, but which were also open to scholars of a more humble descent. Sarpi, for example, was not a patrician and yet he was a regular participant in these scholarly gatherings of the nobility. What is more, his role as a leading intellectual was widely acknowledged and this paved the way for his subsequent career as the senate's adviser.

84 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 525–527; Milton, *Areopagitica*, p. 7.

Perhaps the most important of these coteries was the so-called *ridotto Morosini*, the house of Andrea and Nicolò Morosini. The Morosini house was frequented by such patricians as Leonardo Donà, Nicolò Contarini, Marco Trevisano, Ottaviano Bon, Antonio Querini, Giannantonio Venier, Domenico Molino and Luigi (or Alvise) Lollino, and by scholars like Sarpi, Micanzio, Galileo and the Dominican friar and philosopher Giordano Bruno.[85] Galileo joined the group soon after settling in Padua in 1592, which was also the year when Giordano Bruno attended the meetings. We have no evidence of Sarpi and Bruno having met one another, but it is unlikely that Bruno would not have heard of Sarpi during his stay in Venice.[86]

A controversial figure, Bruno was accused for example of Arianism and pantheism. He had left Italy in 1579 and traveled in Switzerland, France, England and Germany. In 1582 Bruno had published a book on the art of memory (*Ars reminiscendi*) and Giovanni Mocenigo, a respected Venetian senator, was keen to learn about this art. On Mocenigo's invitation, Bruno arrived to Venice in 1592 from Frankfurt, where he had sojourned amongst the local Carmelites. However, Bruno's belief in unorthodox ideas such as the existence of a plurality of worlds soon made Mocenigo suspicious of his guest. Mocenigo denounced Bruno to the inquisition and the latter was imprisoned and interrogated during the summer of 1592, but it took several months before the senate yielded to inquisition's demand to send him to Rome. For the last seven years of his life Bruno was held in a Roman prison, waiting for the slowly advancing juridical process to come to its gruesome end at the stake in Campo de' Fiori where he was put to death in 1600. The leader of the *giovani*, Leonardo Donà, was one of a group of Venetian patricians opposed to the extradition of Bruno and when the latter was finally expelled, it was a triumph for the pro-Roman party of the *vecchi*. One can sense a defensive attitude also in the following words of Andrea Morosini, one of the brothers hosting the *ridotto* Morosini: "I always considered him a Catholic, and if there would have been even a slightest suspicion of the contrary, I would not have permitted him to enter our home".[87]

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85 Benzoni 1977, p. 102. Gabrieli 1957, p. 234, adds the French erudite Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and the Dalmatian diplomat Gian Francesco Biondi (who eventually converteded to Protestantism and was employed by James I) to the list of people who frequented these circles.

86 Benzoni 2006, p. 6, considers this "unthinkable". For Bruno visiting *ridotto* Morosini, see Sosio 2006, p. 212; Viallon and Dompnier 2010, pp. 211–212.

87 Cozzi 1979, p. 142. I quote from Guzzo 1985, p. 26: "*io l'ho sempre tenuto per catolico; e quando avesse avuto un minimo suspetto del contrario, io non l'averei mai permesso, che egli fosse entrato in casa nostra*". For Mocenigo and the process of Bruno, see *ibid*., pp. 23–27.

It is likely that Sarpi shared Donà's and Morosini's view as far as Bruno's imprisonment is concerned. At least he did not think highly of Giovanni Mocenigo, as we can see from his remark in a letter to Antonio Foscarini: "Mocenigo has arrived to Rome; be it God's will that he will not cause trouble".[88]

The group that frequented *Ridotto* Morosini also included some of the most influential politicians of the period. Donà and Contarini later went on to become doges and together with Antonio Querini were the chief architects behind the self-assured politics of the *giovani*. Members of the group discussed philosophy and science, but also politics and religion. They also had a special interest in the political affairs of France, an interest, which Sarpi later fostered through his correspondence. Some years after the *ridotto Morosini* had been closed, Andrea Morosini noted that the participants of that circle discussed "natural phenomena, customs and divine things".[89] The discussions of these "25–30 men of remarkable virtue", as Micanzio put it, took place in an informal atmosphere, without "the ceremony, the mannered and superfluous characteristic of our times, which exhausts the brain of the most perspicacious ones, and wastes so much time".[90] According to Micanzio Sarpi was capable of supporting or attacking any given theme in such a way that it "aroused amazement". Sarpi was an active member of the group. Indeed, Micanzio wrote that throughout his life Sarpi was occupied by three things: "the service of God, the studies and the conversations".[91]

The *ridotto* Morosini was by no means the only Venetian coterie to witness learned and political discussions. A number of Venetian patricians frequented similar groups in Padua, for example those hosted by Gian Vincenzo Pinelli. Amongst these patricians were Donato and Andrea Morosini, Nicolò and Francesco Contarini, Luigi Lollino, Leonardo Mocenigo, Ottaviano Bon, Pietro Duodo, Francesco Soranzo, Antonio Querengo, Girolamo Frachetta, Paolo Aricardi and Giulio Carrari. Pinelli had one of the greatest private libraries of the period and it was used by scholars such as Sarpi, Galileo, Torquato Tasso,

88 I quote from Cozzi 1995, p. 110, note 82: "*Mocenigo è gionto a Roma; Dio voglia che non facci pazzie*".

89 I quote from Cozzi 1979, p. 137: "*de rerum natura, de moribus, de divina rebus*". For *ridotto* Morosini's circle in general, see Benzoni 1977, pp. 102–103; Bouwsma 1968, p. 236; Cozzi 1969, pp. 21–22; Cozzi 1995, pp. 41–42; Da Pozzo 1968, pp. 88–89.

90 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1306: "*25 e 30 uomini di virtù insigni*" . . . "*non aveva ingresso la ceremonia, a'nostri tempi cosa affettata e superflua, che stanca il cervello de'più perspicaci e consuma vanamente tanto tempo*".

91 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1308: "*il servizio di Dio, i studii e le conversazioni*". For Sarpi's erudition, see *ibid*., pp. 1284–1285, 1300–1304.

Sperone Speroni, Marino Ghetaldi and Justus Lipsius. Also Cesare Baronio, Robert Bellarmine and Tommaso Campanella have been added to this impressive list, and Luisa Cozzi has suggested that Sarpi and Campanella met one another at Pinelli's home.[92] Antonio Querengo's home in turn hosted Galileo, Paolo Gualdo, Lorenzo Pignoria and Vincenzo Contarini.[93] Occasional gatherings took place elsewhere in the *terraferma*, for example in Belluno in the home of Luigi Lollino, if less frequently than those in Venice and Padua.

In addition to this, some patricians felt the urge to establish private academies and others were keen to join them. This was an essential part of Venetian social life and perhaps, at least to some of them, a fashionable thing to do. In 1561 Paolo Paruta founded an academy, which encouraged its members to reflect on questions related to politics and *vita civile*. The members of the academy of *Filaleti*, instead, gathered in the home of Battista Nani in order to explore "optics", "perspective", "force" and "shadows". In Antonio Brandarci's academy one could discuss geography, history and physics. Another geographic academy was aptly named the *Argonauti*. Paolo Sarotti founded an academy called the *Sarottiana*, which focused on the study of the secrets of nature, practising experiments with a "reasonably progressive method". It has been noted that there were no traces of the scientific revolution in these academies and that they lacked the rigor of the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome and the experimental spirit of the *Accademia del Cimento* in Florence. Venetian academies focused on promoting literary culture, instead of investigating nature with the rigor of Galileo and other professional scientists. Pietro Duodo, the founder of the military academy of *Delia*, nevertheless sought advice from Galileo when he was planning the study program for his academy. In keeping with his own interests, Galileo recommended the inclusion of mathematics, geometry and mechanics into the curriculum.[94]

Despite the amateurish nature of these academies, the patricians' involvement in scientific activities was more than a mere pastime. Theirs was an activity that advanced 'perfection', an obsession of the period. According to many Renaissance thinkers, while the ultimate perfection was in God and in the knowledge of God, a lesser perfection was to be found in the development

92 Grendler 1977, pp. 288–289. The library consisted of 6500 books and 800 manuscripts in seven different languages, and the collection included at least 90 prohibited works. For Pinelli's circle, see Sosio 2006, p. 184; Ferrone 2007, pp. 96–97; Luisa Cozzi's note in, Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 669.

93 Benzoni 1977, pp. 105–106.

94 Benzoni 1977, pp. 107, 115–117, 142.

of man himself. A Venetian nobleman was supposed to strive for perfection by studying throughout his own life-time, and, by becoming more perfect, he was also expected to become a more useful member of the society or the state. Francesco Barozzi (1537–1604), a Venetian patrician and mathematician, wrote to his nephew Giacomo Barozzi in 1597, entreating him to approach the impending seven years at the University of Padua as a prelude to falling in love with "*belle lettere e scienze*". Barozzi assured his junior that he would then never cease to study and would, as a result, become more and more perfect.[95] Similarly, Agostino Valier, the future bishop of Verona and a future cardinal, wrote to a younger patrician that "the most noble companion to the political life is the study of letters, for it takes away idleness, curiosity and distractions, conserves and strengthens good reputation, makes a man wiser and more useful to himself and to others".[96] Sarpi's friend and the future doge Nicolò Contarini claimed brazenly that he had not attended the University of Padua in order to be instructed, but to form his spirit.[97] Venetian noblemen wanted to cultivate themselves in order to become more perfect precisely as noblemen, as opposed to academics or scientists. In fact, of the approximately twenty doges from Pietro Lando (doge in 1538–1545) to Niccolò Contarini only one (Niccolò da Ponte) graduated at Padua. A university degree was important only for certain professions. Patricians were in the first place politicians whose need for university education was confined to the extent to which it served to prepare them for the *vita activa*. Confirming this, Contarini claimed that philosophy was impoverishing if it was not directed and beneficial to civil life.[98]

By the beginning of the sixteenth century education had already become a matter of the state in Venice. There were two kinds of primary schools: parochial schools, run by the clerics, and the free state schools called *scuole di sestiere*. Teaching was not restricted to the learning of alphabets, it also included religious and moral instruction. However, the revenues reserved for administering the *scuole di sestiere* were distributed somewhat irregularly, a fact which undoubtedly undermined the quality of teaching in these schools. This does not necessarily mean that the nobility of Venice would have failed to recognize the importance of education at the *scuole di sestiere*, as we can see from the government's regulation to include Christian doctrine into state schools'

95 Rose 1977, p. 175.

96 I quote from Cozzi 1995, p. 29: "*Nobilissimo compagno della vita politica è lo studio delle lettere, leva l'otio, la curiosità, le detrattioni, conserva et accresce la buona fama, fa l'huomo più savio et più utile a se stesso et a gl'altri*". See also Logan 1996, p. 218.

97 Tenenti 1959, p. 155.

98 Benzoni 1994, pp. 526, 531.

curriculum from 1520 onwards. This decision has been seen as an attempt to attack church's monopoly in religious education.[99]

The Council of Trent encouraged the Church of Rome to take decisive measures in order to cleanse Catholic universities of heretics. In 1564 pope Pius IV decreed in his bull *In sacrosanta* that no one could graduate from a university without signing a profession of faith. This was problematic for such an international university as Padua with its many protestant and Greek orthodox students. Venetians' attempt to obtain an exemption from the pope proved futile and they turned to the palatine counts, whose power to confer doctorates was imperial and who, moreover, did not make demands on the profession of faith. In the early seventeenth century, however, the Venetian aristocracy began to undermine the authority of extra-governmental institutions and to concentrate the rule of power into the hands of the senate and other central organs of the state. They wanted to minimize the power of the palatine counts too and, consequently, introduced a new system in 1616, according to which the so-called *Collegio Veneto* could confer doctorates to "poor students and others" by "Venetian authority". This development reflected the nobility's desire to transfer both ecclesiastical and imperial privileges into their own hands in order to strengthen and display the sovereignty of their own power.[100]

The University of Padua and Its Patrician Students

The late-Renaissance University of Padua was a stronghold of Aristotelianism, although the teaching of metaphysics remained a combination of Aristotelian and Christian doctrines.[101] This combination bespeaks the persistent tendency to combine religion and natural sciences, despite the challenge introduced by Ockhamian and Averroistic traditions of science: both rejected the synthesis of religion and science cherished by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1275)—arguably the most influential of medieval thinkers—and, instead, focused on the pure natural philosophy of Aristotle.[102] Padua was one of the first universities to advance medicinal botany by establishing a chair in 1533 and a botanical garden in 1546. A further innovation was the anatomical theatre (built in 1594), which became the model for similar theatres constructed subsequently in other European universities, and which was allegedly built according to the

99 De Bernardin 1983, pp. 61–63, 65.

100 De Bernardin 1983, pp. 66–67, 71–72.

101 Grendler 2006, p. 140.

102 Randall 1940, p. 180.

architectural vision of Sarpi.[103] At the same time, the changes that took place in medical faculties during the sixteenth century usually meant incorporating some new elements rather than replacing old practices outright. For example, Paduan professors continued teaching updated editions of Avicenna instead of discarding such archaic texts.[104]

The political elite of Venice no doubt valued science and learning, if not for other reasons, then at least because a university education was considered an essential part of the upbringing of a nobleman. Even if the patriciate at times overlooked the financial needs of primary state schools, they took pride in the University of Padua, which had for a long time attracted celebrated scholars such as Nicholas of Cusa, Pietro Pomponazzi, Nicolaus Copernicus, Andreas Vesalius, William Harvey, and, more recently, Galileo. Of these, Vesalius and Galileo taught at Padua, while others numbered amongst the university's students. Such illustrious alumni notwithstanding, the Venetian nobility's attitude towards the university was marked by provincialism and zealous surveillance. The government decreed in 1407 and repeatedly during the following two centuries that the University of Padua was to be considered the only place where citizens of the republic were supposed to study, if they hoped to become employed by the state. Indeed, it seems that no Venetian patrician studied at any other university than Padua after 1407.[105]

It has been argued that Venice's government guaranteed liberty of education in Padua from 1404 onwards.[106] Yet, 'liberty' is a relative concept and it should be pointed out that the teaching at the university of Padua remained under the strict surveillance of the Venetian nobility. In the first place, this was effected through the so called *riformatori allo studio*, the three patricians whose responsibility it was to control all things related to the university. This was recognized as an important task and the reformers were chosen from the most powerful and experienced patricians, who, in addition, had either studied at Padua or had a reputation for their learning.[107] In 1614, for instance, the three reformators expressed their worry over the circulation of books which were "prejudicial to the Catholic religion and to the liberty and the authority

103 Mazzini 1838, p. 157: "tradition attributes to him (Sarpi) the design of the anatomical theatre at Padua and other edifices". Sarpi's contribution is also suggested in a modern information plaque by the entrance to the theatre at the University of Padua.

104 Siraisi 1997, pp. 13–14; Ongaro 2001–2003, pp. 169, 171, 173.

105 Grendler 2006, p. 137.

106 Randall 1940, p. 184.

107 Grendler 2006, p. 145.

of the princes".[108] Although Venice's recurrent conflicts with the papacy might suggest otherwise, the government of Venice was always attentive to preserve religious orthodoxy within its dominion. This applied to Padua as well and, for example, in the constitution of 1567 of the faculties of philosophy and medicine it is declared—in the spirit of the council of Trent—that members of the faculties should observe not only the old ceremonies and constitutions, but also the "sacred laws of the Roman church".[109] The constitution of 1553 in turn defended the Catholic creed in a decisively aggressive tone when it denied Jews the right to take exams in these faculties, because they were "impious", a "race born" to be "wicked".[110]

Surveillance was by no means limited to religious questions only. In 1614 some of the leading senators commented on frequent abuses in the administration of incomes at the university and in the next month the three reformers, one of whom was Nicolò Contarini, referred to "a very bad corruption" in the teaching methods. According to their report, university teachers did not teach texts which would have helped students to gain a wider understanding of their field, but only such "passages which serve to attain the doctorate".[111] Even though the patriciate of Venice sought to ensure that no prejudice was caused to the Catholic creed at Padua, several bishops raised the issue of secularization of the control of education in the council of Trent, complaining that universities had received such exemptions that bishops who previously kept vigilant and authoritative watch on their activities no longer knew what was taught at them.[112] The concern of these prelates mirrors both the process of centralization of power into the hands of lay nobility in early seventeenth-century Venice and the bishops' anxiety in the face of what followed this, namely, the gradual secularization of some of the most essential institutions

108 ASV, *Riformatori allo studio*, filza 1, f. 330: "*li quali libri sono pregiudiciali alla religione Cattolica et alla libertà, et auttorità delli Prencipi*".

109 BNM, *Constitutionum sacri patavini collegii philosophorum ac medicorum*, p. lxxxvii: "*ut sacris, ac cerimonijs retineandis, maiorum nostrorum instituta tueamur, sanctaeque Romanae Ecclesiae leges*".

110 BNM, *Constitutionum sacri patavini collegii philosophorum ac medicorum*, p. liv: "*cum judei impiis et ad scelera . . . natum genus . . . statuimus atque sancimus, ut Judei . . . examen nulla ratione admittantur*".

111 ASV, *Riformatori allo studio*, filza 1, ff. 331v, 332: "*una pessima corrutella nel studio nostro di Padova, che da Dottori non si leggono à Scolari li Testi degl' auttori di quelle professioni, delle quali intendono far profitto, ma li punti soli, che servono à conseguire il titolo del Dottorato, et non la vera disciplina della scienza, che studiano*".

112 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 287: "*Le università con essenzioni si sono sotratte che il vescovo non può sapere quello che insegnino*".

of the state. At the same time, however, secular rulers themselves were keen to avow religious orthodoxy and denied all accusations of impiety, which suggests that the process of secularization did not necessarily result in the spread of irreligiousness and atheism, but simply indicated a delegation of the responsibility to control institutions such as the university from the members of the clergy to equally religious members of the laity. This was exactly what Sarpi wanted to achieve, a secularized and yet pious society.

Whereas most students enrolled in Italian universities studied law or medicine,[113] Venetian patricians studied for the most part philosophy, letters and theology. Legal studies were rather neglected (see, however, the example of Luigi Lollino below) and it may also be symptomatic that Sarpi, who in practice was the senate's political and legal adviser, was actually a theologian by education. Gasparo Contarini—who never graduated—studied natural philosophy, theology, Greek, mathematics and astronomy, subjects which were irrelevant for a future civil servant, but which were understood to enhance the spirit and character of a nobleman. Similarly, Doge Leonardo Donà read widely in history and mystical texts. Donà's personal library was one of the greatest private libraries in Venice, consisting of 800 volumes of which the biggest individual group, 207 volumes, was formed by theological books. Besides theology, Donà's library contained history, poetry (classical poetry, but also Dante and Petrarca), and philosophers such as Aristotle, Boëthius, Marsilio Ficino and Ramon Lull.[114] Donà's philosophical interests alone reflect the eclectic nature of the education of the Venetian nobility. His readings ran from Aristotelianism to Neoplatonism, and from Boëthius' contemplative philosophy to the mysticism and encyclopedism expressed in Lull's writings.

Amongst these learned patricians Luigi Lollino stands out as a particularly erudite person who, incidentally, fostered a strong predilection for humanistic culture. The fact that such a humanist was also a close friend of Sarpi's demonstrates the latter's openness to other than the strictly scholastic approach to learning. Lollino was born in Candia in 1552 (the same year as Sarpi) and spent the first twenty years of his life in Crete. In 1572 he joined his Cretan friends Emmanuel Pigas, Emmanuel Margounios and Daniel Phourlanos at the University of Padua, where they all showed interest in philosophy and in particular, in Aristotle. Lollino studied philosophy, medicine, mathematics and metaphysics under the guidance of Jacopo Zabarella, Francesco Piccolomini,

113 Grendler 2006, pp. 138–139.

114 Grendler 2006, pp. 139, 143; Benzoni 1994, pp. 529–530; Zorzi 1990, pp. 130–131. Interestigly, Lohr 1988, pp. 545, 548–554, points out that Lullism found its first permanent support in early fifteenth-century Padua, one of its advocates being Nicholas of Cusa.

Gian Francesco Mussato, Giuseppe Moletti and Tommaso Peregrino. The relationship between Lollino and Piccolomini was particularly close, since the latter asked Lollino to become the godfather of his child. Lollino was also very close to Mussato and Sperone Speroni. Naturally, he made friends with many young patricians who studied at Padua, including Andrea and Donato Morosini, Nicolò and Francesco Contarini, Leonardo Mocenigo, Ottaviano Bon, Francesco Vendramino, Pietro Duodo, Francesco Soranzo, Antonio Querengo and Gian Vincenzo Pinelli. Notwithstanding his interest in philosophy, Lollino graduated *in iure utroque* and later, at the age of forty-four, he received another degree in theology. By that time he had already become the bishop of Belluno.[115]

Lollino collected books and especially old Greek manuscripts, which his friend Emmanuel Margounios sent him from Crete. Over a period of time, Lollino gained reputation as an erudite and as an owner of a great library of 1780 volumes, particularly rich in Greek and Latin manuscripts. Lollino made new friends, such as Minuccio Minucci, Enrico Davila and Sarpi, whose letters to Lollino suggest that their friendship was close. When the future cardinal Jacques Davy Duperron was returning from Rome and stopped in Venice for few days, the government of Venice assigned Sarpi and Lollino to accompany the prelate during his stay. This is a clear sign of the learned reputation of the two, and according to Micanzio the three men spent several days discussing the "affairs of state or literature".[116] The bishop visited Lollino's library and afterwards wrote amicable letters to him. Lollino took pleasure in studying Church Fathers and enriched his library. It is likely that Sarpi visited the latter too. However, whereas Sarpi grew increasingly anticlerical during the first years of the seventeenth century, Lollino maintained his good relations to Rome. This is also confirmed by his correspondence with Duperron. Unlike Sarpi and the *giovani*, Lollino remained impartial during the interdict crisis. In fact, Lollino had spent some time in Rome (some of his stay overlapped with Sarpi's visit to the city in 1585–1588) and he had become friends with cardinal Cesare Baronio (1538–1607), one of the most influential prelates of the period. Baronio praised Lollino's library, observing contently that it was "*graecis libris opulentis*". That Lollino sent the original manuscript of Dionisio Alessandrino—one of his most valuable literary possessions—to the Vatican and later received a grateful letter from the receiver, pope Paul V, is a further indication of the former's close relations with Rome.[117] If Lollino figured amongst Sarpi's friends, Paul V was

115 Canart 1970, pp. 554, 556–557; Alpago Novello 1933, pp. 24–25, 27, 43. According to Alpago Novello Lollino was born in 1557, but Canart refutes this date.

116 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1312: "*più giorni quasi sempre in discorsi di stato o di lettere*".

117 Canart 1970, pp. 561–562, 567; Alpago Novello 1933, pp. 31–32, 38, 40, 65.

clearly Sarpi's principal adversary. Lollino's position illustrates the fact that despite the strong anticlerical faction formed by Sarpi and the *giovani*, there were people who, like Lollino, remained at once connected to the anticlerical group and careful not to collide with the papacy.

Not only were Sarpi and Lollino born in the same year (Lollino died in 1625, two years after Sarpi), but both had also graduated in theology at Padua, where they most likely followed some of the same lectures. Indeed, Tommaso Peregrino, the professor of metaphysics at Padua and one of Lollino's teachers, was also one of the professors present at Sarpi's thesis defence.[118] Sarpi and Lollino were in general regarded as scholarly men, sharing an evident interest in books and literature. Although in many ways so similar, their view about Rome divided them sharply: while Sarpi remained obstinately hostile towards the papacy, Lollino considered Rome the queen of Italy, just as he thought Italy was the queen of Europe and Europe was the queen of the world.[119] Not surprising, of the two it was Lollino who became a bishop. It nevertheless seems that their friendship was stronger than the difference in their attitude towards Rome: the papal nuncio Berlingherio Gessi approached Lollino in the summer of 1608 and asked him to "uncover the mind" of Sarpi, which Lollino agreed to do, "but so coldly" that Gessi "became doubtful".[120]

Born in Siena, Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) held the chair of natural philosophy at padua from 1560 until 1598. During these decades he had an immense influence on the scholarly upbringing of young Venetian patricians, including Lollino. The latter became a friend, protégé and biographer of Piccolomini. The biography was nevertheless remarkably critical and Lollino did not shy away from depicting his teacher as a greedy academic mainly interested in money and his own career. True or not, Piccolomini did teach natural philosophy for several decades and this was not always easy, as is clear from his rivalry with Federico Pendasio (1522–1603), also a professor of natural philosophy at Padua. From 1568 to 1570 Piccolomini and Pendasio lectured at the same time on the third book of Aristotle's *De anima*—a coincidence, which inevitably aggravated the already difficult relationship between them. Eventually Piccolomini annoyed Pendasio to such an extent that in 1571 the latter moved to Bologna, leaving his nemesis as the "*dominatore*" of the University of Padua.

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118 Cozzi 1996, p. xxxi, note 11.

119 Alpago Novello 1933, p. 40: "*Quod orbis terrarum Europa, Europae Italia, Italiae Roma Regina sit*".

120 Alpago Novello 1933, pp. 34–35: "*Il Vescovo Lollino, quando lo ricercai di fare come da sé officio per iscoprire l'animo di F. Paolo Servita, mi disse di farlo ma così freddamente ch'io mi dubitai*".

As a result, Piccolomini was considered the "*philosophus primus*". Philosophers such as Arcangelo Mercenario, Jacopo Zabarella and Cesare Cremonini held only secondary chairs. Piccolomini's salary was also many times bigger than that of Zabarella.[121]

During his long stay at Padua Piccolomini lectured mainly on Aristotle's works concerning natural philosophy (*De anima, Physica, De generatione et corruptione, De caelo*). His approach to Aristotle was synchronous in the sense that he preferred to compare Aristotle's ideas with those of Plato. To Piccolomini these two were by far the greatest philosophers of antiquity. In 1583 he published his first book *Universa philosophia de moribus*, a study on the moral philosophy of Aristotle, Plato and the Stoics. Although Piccolomini considered Aristotle without doubt the supreme philosopher, he remained reluctant to reject such distinguished thinkers as Plato and Seneca. His solution was to reduce philosophical disputes into a mere question of the different terminologies used by different philosophers. By claiming that such controversies were simply about words he was able to endorse Aristotle's doctrines without refuting the philosophies of Plato or Seneca.[122] Whether Sarpi learned this technique from Piccolomini, the interpretation of disputes as mere conceptual misunderstandings became characteristic of his subsequent thought. "All our studies and philosophies", Sarpi concluded in a *pensiero* written after his graduation, "aim to uncover the deceptions of words and concepts".[123] Although a theologian by education, Sarpi was thoroughly acquainted with Aristotle's natural philosophy, a factor which might suggest that he was amongst Piccolomini's students. These included, after all, his friends Lollino and Nicolò Contarini, and if Sarpi followed Peregrino's lectures on metaphysics, he may well have followed Piccolomini's teaching on Aristotle too.

Piccolomini was in the habit of having private meetings with a limited number of his students, chosen on the basis of the importance and the prestige of their families. According to Lollino, Piccolomini rewarded each of these chosen students with a manuscript at the moment of their graduation. The manuscript, written by Piccolomini himself, was afterwards published by the student under his own name. These manuscripts did not form any part of the academic requirements, but they certainly added something to the

121 Baldini 1980, pp. 389, 393, 395–397. While in 1583 Piccolomini's salary was 1150 florins, Zabarella received only 260 florins in 1580. When Cremonini followed as the holder of Piccolomi's chair in 1601, his salary was 600 florins.

122 Baldini 1980, pp. 397–398; Kraye 2002, pp. 60–61, 67–69.

123 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 553, p. 415: "*ogni nostro studio ed ogni nostra filosofia tende a scoprir gl'inganni delle parole e ancor dei concetti*".

scholarly reputation of the students. In effect, this practice was a means of ensuring for Piccolomini the gratitude of his chosen students and their powerful families.[124] While Jacopo Gaddi confirmed these accusations in his *De scriptoribus non ecclesiasticis* (1649), some scholars have suggested that Piccolomini was merely an instigator and not the author of these manuscripts.[125] Lollino claims that at least Andrea Duodo's *De habitibus intellectus libri sex* (1577), Pietro Duodo's *Peripateticarum de anima disputationum* (1587) and Stefano Tiepolo's *Academicarum contemplationum* (1587) were actually written by Piccolomini (who, incidentally, praises the two Duodo brothers in his *Universa philosophia*). Further books to issue from the same suspicious context include e.g. Luigi Pesaro's *De priscorum sapientium placitis* (1567), Girolamo Cappello's *De disciplinis ingenuis* (1570), Tommaso Contarini's *De humana tranquillitate aeneas una* (1572), Francesco Morosini's *De rerum causis assertiones* (1582), and, last but not least, Nicolò Contarini's *De perfectione rerum libri sex* (1576). It has been observed that apart from the works of the brothers Duodo and Stefano Tiepolo, it is difficult to assess the consistency of Piccolomini's intervention in these works.[126]

As far as philosophical disputes are concerned, Venetians were eager to conciliate and to look for a golden mean. Besides Piccolomini's syncronous teaching of Aristotle, this is reflected by the popularity of Lullism, which also favoured tolerance in its approach.[127] Most famously, however, Venice was tolerant in religious issues, and although the long-term antagonism between Venice and Rome could be seen in terms of the attempts of Venetians to defend freedom of thought and confession, the conflict issued from calculated economic and political interests. Venice lived on foreign trade and could not afford to isolate itself from the Protestant world. This entailed not only welcoming foreign merchants—regardless their religious background—but also encouraging Protestant students to come study at the University of Padua. These measures produced a combination of scholarly openness and religious tolerance, which in turn gave Venice its famous reputation for freedom. From the point of view of Rome, such freedom implied secularism, which had to be checked.

Although Piccolomini advanced a conciliatory approach to philosophy and science, he was not the first to do so at Padua. Francesco Barozzi (1537–1604),

124 Baldini 1980, p. 399.

125 Baldini 1980, p. 399 note 5 (Baldini indicates Antonino Poppi and E.A. Cicogna as such scholars), and p. 401 for the reference to Gaddi.

126 Baldini 1980, pp. 402–403.

127 Lohr 1988, p. 545.

for instance, tried to reconcile Aristotle and Plato in his mathematical studies. He emphasized the fundamental importance of mathematics, an indication that he preferred Plato over Aristotle.[128] Barozzi studied Proclus, the fifth-century neoplatonist philosopher and mathematician, and included his own translation of one of Proclus' works in his *Opusculum* (1560). In the treatise Proclus examined the role of mathematics in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Following the translation of Proclus' work, Barozzi's *Opusculum* moved on to deal with the fashionable question of the certitude of mathematics and debated Aristotle's view that mathematical certainty applied only to immaterial things.[129] In his *Oratio ad Philosophiam Virtutemque* (1577), which he dedicated to his Aristotelian teacher Genuanus, Barozzi endorsed the Platonist theory of mathematics as the unifier of heaven and earth. Although Barozzi seems to have favoured Plato over Aristotle, in the last part of the *Opusculum* he aimed to show that Plato and Aristotle actually agreed on the importance of mathematics. Furthermore, in 1577 Barozzi wrote to Sebastiano Buonrizzo and claimed that Aristotle and Plato had largely agreed on many questions and disagreed only on a few things. The same year saw the publication of Agostino Valier's *De recta philosophandi ratione*, in which this influential Venetian bishop argued for a reconciliation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.[130] It is significant that Barozzi studied Proclus, since Proclus combined the Aristotelian theory of scientific demonstration with the Platonist idea of the sublimity of mathematics. An important and continuous debate on mathematics and epistemology took place at the mid-sixteenth-century University of Padua and this was the origin of Barozzi's *Opusculum*. Some decades later this debate reached its peak with Galileo who in fact owned a copy of *Opusculum*.[131]

In 1585 Barozzi published his *Cosmographia*, an attack against the thirteenth-century astronomer Johannes de Sacrobosco. Barozzi hoped that his *Cosmographia* would replace the latter's *De sphaera* as a university textbook and, apparently to his end, focused in the first sixty pages on listing the errors of Sacrobosco. The famous Jesuit mathematician Cristoforo Clavio (1538–1612)—with whom Barozzi corresponded—retorted that Sacrobosco's 'errors' were actually not errors at all, but mere "improprieties". Barozzi was nonetheless eager to gain publicity for his new book and sent copies and letters to many leading mathematicians including Guidobaldo del Monte (1545–1607),

128 Benzoni 1994, p. 566.

129 Rose 1977, p. 123.

130 Logan 1996, pp. 217, 221.

131 Rose 1977, pp. 122–125.

Girolamo Mercuriale (1530–1606), Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) and Sarpi. Although Sarpi had a copy of *Cosmographia*, there is no mention of Barozzi in his writings. This may be because Barozzi rejected heliocentric theory, calling it the "false opinion of Aristarchus and Copernicus",[132] while Sarpi clearly favoured Copernicus' interpretation of the universe.

Besides corresponding with Guidobaldo del Monte and Cristoforo Clavio, Barozzi was a friend of Venetian patricians such as Giacomo Contarini and Daniele Barbarigo. Contarini not only had one of the greatest private libraries in Venice, he also possessed various scientific or "mathematical" instruments, statues, paintings, "minerals, stones, secrets and other things". According to Contarini's testament, his house had four rooms filled with books and "exquisite things", which were open to scholars and friends. In fact, anyone could enter: "guest, traveler, domestic, friend", as long as they observed the instruction to abandon envy, hatred, ostentation and temerity and instead furnish their stay with jokes, laughter, spirit and good humour. In 1713 the 1500 printed books and 175 manuscripts of Contarini's library became part of the Biblioteca Marciana collection.[133]

Daniele Barbarigo in turn was a friend of Domenico Morosini, Giovanni della Casa, Benedetto Varchi, Sperone Speroni, Pietro Bembo and Gasparo Contarini. The French historian Jacques Auguste de Thou said that Barbarigo admired the Stagirite to such an extent that had he not been a Christian, "he would had sworn in the name of Aristotle".[134] Barbarigo was one of those influential persons to whom Barozzi sent a copy of his *Opusculum* and in June 1560 Barbarigo wrote back to him asserting that he had always held the same opinion as Barozzi and that he had hoped for someone to come up to refute the opinion of Alessandro Piccolomini "as new and unfounded".[135] Consequently, Barozzi had both an Aristotelian teacher (Genuanus) and a friend who shared his ideas and who was—judging from De Thou's remark—a fervent Aristotelian. It would be incorrect to talk exclusively about Barozzi's Platonism or Aristotelianism. His approach underlined the importance of mathematics and by doing so helped to pave the way to the new science of Galileo and his

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132 Rose 1977, pp. 132, 135–138.

133 Cozzi 1979, p. 160 note 61 (a quote from Contarini's testament): "*le quattro stanze . . . dove vi sono cose esquisite . . . così de libri a stampa, come de scritti a pena, instrumenti matematici et . . . minerali, pietre, secreti et altri*"; Zorzi 1990, pp. 147–148.

134 Alberigo 1964, p. 90: "*Soleva dire* (Barbarigo) *che se non fosse cristiano, avrebbe giurato sulle parole di Aristotele, tanto ammirava il felicissimo ingegno di lui*".

135 Rose 1977, pp. 119, 161: "*sempre io son stato di quella opinione, che difendete, et haveva caro, che venisse uno, che rifiutasse quella del Piccolomini, come nova, et non fondata*".

followers. At the same time, however, Barozzi's approach was peculiar and yet typical in the sense that it combined Aristotelianism with some other school of philosophy (in his case Platonism). Already Proclus himself—whom Barozzi studied so carefully—had combined Aristotelian analysis of mathematical demonstration with his more generally Platonic approach to philosophy of mathematics. Barozzi's studies on Proclus brought him considerable fame and he was admired by mathematicians such as Petrus Ramus, John Dee, Francesco Commandino, Cristoforo Clavio and Bernardino Baldi.[136]

Of all the patricians interested in natural sciences it was Nicolò Contarini who was the closest to Sarpi. A year younger than Sarpi, Contarini published his *De perfectione rerum libri sex* in 1576. Although this was not a ground-breaking scientific work, it nevertheless is an illuminating example of the philosophical interests and education of a Venetian nobleman. Perhaps rather due to the renowned name of the author than to its scientific merits a second edition of Contarini's book was published in the late 1580s and still in 1609 Sarpi's French correspondent Jacques Leschassier wanted a copy for himself. Sarpi in fact sent him a copy with an accompanying letter, in which he characterized the book as a "compendium or summary of philosophy". However, Sarpi remarked that Contarini himself had hoped that Leschassier would not judge him on the basis of the book, written in his youth, especially because in his mature age he had oriented himself to "higher and more useful studies", that is, to history and politics. Sarpi was pleased with the sympathy Leschassier showed towards Contarini, with whom he had been friends since childhood and to whom he was "very much connected".[137] There is, indeed, something very similar in the way Sarpi's and Contarini's intellectual interests developed during their lives: both started with natural philosophy (more precisely, with the question of the beginning and perfection of things), turned then to studies of history and moral philosophy, and, finally became central figures in Venice's political life.

Besides the University of Padua, there also was a Jesuit school that contributed to higher education in Venice's region.[138] Like the university, the Jesuit College too was located in Padua and the rivalry between the two educational

136 Carugo 1984, pp. 158–159, 164.

137 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 29 September 1609, pp. 60–61: "*liber est veluti philosophiae compendium, aut summa . . . altioribus et utilioribus studiis animum applicuit, post adeptam virilem aetatem . . . cui ego ante 40 annos amicitia puerili iunctus, nunc coniunctissimus vivo*". See also Cozzi 1995, pp. 47–48.

138 See, however, Schmitt 1983, p. 109, who notes that Padua also hosted important Dominican and Franciscan schools, in which metaphysics and theology "were cultivated in a serious and concentrated way".

institutions reached such a point in 1591 that the senate forbade the Jesuits to teach any other than their own students. Earlier in the same year a group of young patricians dressed only in sheets went to the Jesuits, threw away the sheets and shouted insults at the students of the rival school. A few months later Cesare Cremonini and some other teachers protested against the Jesuit school and prompted the senate to take action.[139] The most obvious difference between the two universities was that one was subject to the temporal government of Venice while the other was obedient to the pope, a fact, which undoubtedly spurred the senate to restrict the teaching rights of the Jesuits. Sarpi was certainly in favour of this, just as he was pleased to hear that the Jesuits were not allowed to teach in Paris, hoping only that the prohibition would have been extended without limits.[140] At the same time, the Jesuits and their supporters claimed that the University of Padua—its *curricula* and atmosphere of religious tolerance—was likely to pervert those who studied there.[141] The main cause of this worry was the large number of foreign students who confessed a non-Catholic creed. This view was not shared by an anonymous letter-writer who—in a letter most likely written in the early years of the seventeenth century—expressed a degree of concern about the fact that the number of foreign students in Padua was so small. Interestingly, the writer noted that Cesare Cremonini was the teacher who had the greatest number of foreign students attending his lessons.[142]

The tension caused by the presence of the Jesuits in Venice's territory was not confined to the rivalry between the Jesuit College and the University of Padua, it also existed on a more general and political level. At the beginning of the interdict crisis in 1606 the Jesuits were expelled from the territory of Venice and were allowed to return only in 1657. If we are to believe Sarpi's description of the departure of the Jesuits, they left at night, accompanied by a "multitude of people" expressing their satisfaction because of the event.[143] If Galileo's attitude towards and dealings with the Jesuits was ambiguous, it

139 Cozzi 1979, pp. 144–145; Cozzi 1995, p. 303.

140 Sarpi, *SS*, to Leschassier, 3 February 1609, p. 572: "*Multum est quod Parisiis docere non permittantur, vellem ubique, sed omnia non possunt obtineri*".

141 Cozzi 1995, p. 303.

142 ASV, *Riformatori allo studio*, filza 168.

143 Cozzi 1995, p. 323; Sarpi, *Interdetto*, pp. 223–224: "*moltitudine di populo . . . in lingua veneziana gridò dicendo:* andé in malora".

is clear that Sarpi disliked them.[144] His aversion stemmed from his political and religious views, not from differences in scientific thinking. In general, the *vecchi* were devoted supporters of the Jesuits, while the *giovani* feared that their influence would weaken the spirit of the young patricians and turn them less adept in public affairs.[145]

Hostile as he was towards the papacy and the Jesuits, Sarpi found his political allies and supporters among the flanks of the *giovani*. As we have already seen, this proud and patriotic group of young Venetian patricians emerged towards the end of the sixteenth century. As politicians they were eager to build an internationally more active and influential Venice and they were likely to react impatiently to any attempt to intervene in what they considered to be their own affairs. Paradoxically, a certain degree of intolerance gained ground in the free-spirited and tolerant Venice, which manifested itself in the patriciate's readiness to respond with aggression to any initiative, which was believed to restrict the independence of the republic. It was this group of patriotic and anticlerical patricians who formed Sarpi's immediate circle and offered support for his political objectives.

144 For Galileo and the Jesuits, see Baldini 1992, p. 373, according to whom Galileo was not hostile towards the Jesuits, rather, there were significant connections between him and the Jesuit scholars, and Cozzi 1979, p. 159, who argued that Galileo was connected with many Jesuits, although he did not share their inclinations.

145 Bouwsma 1968, p. 253; Cozzi 1979, pp. 139–141.

CHAPTER 3

Ubiquity of Motion

> For whoever has looked deep into the order of the universe will much better regulate the affairs of his state.
>
> BODIN, *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*

Sarpi's Scientific Interests

Sarpi graduated in theology, but he was equally fascinated by natural sciences. He wrote his first *pensieri* on matter, sense perception and scientific methodology already in 1578 and continued writing such scientific notes until the early years of the following century. In what follows, I argue that Sarpi's interpretation of the universe provided a framework for his political theory and that his scientific and political concerns were fundamentally linked through his concept of motion. In his *pensieri* Sarpi argued that everything in the universe was in a constant state of motion and that the idea of rest was a mere illusion. The concept of ceaseless motion manifested itself in Sarpi's political thought as an emphasis on the need for control and obedience. It was the sovereign ruler invested with absolute power who, while representing God on earth, provided an element of order amid chaos. Furthermore, I argue that Sarpi's natural philosophy rested on two insights: the instability of nature and the imperfection of man. These two ideas were the bedrock of his political thought.

Traditionally, the *curricula* at the University of Padua were heavily influenced by Aristotelianism, which is why also the students of theology were likely to be introduced to studies of natural sciences. This was undoubtedly true in the case of Sarpi who was particularly interested in medical sciences, which in turn were connected to natural philosophy not just administratively, but also through subject matter. Many sixteenth-century physicians were familiar with the key problems of natural philosophy, and, respectively, such natural philosophers or scientists as Pietro Pomponazzi, Georgius Agricola, Michele Mercati, Guillaume Rondelet and William Gilbert had studied medicine before undertaking studies in other scientific fields.[1] In such an academic environment, it is hardly surprising that Sarpi's studies ranged from theology to natural sciences. Indeed, he wrote a scientific treatise on the beginnings and

1 Siraisi 1997, pp. 9–10, 13.

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perfection of things already sometime between 1574–1578.[2] The perfection of things was in fact a popular topic and, as we have seen, Sarpi's friend Nicolò Contarini published his *De perfectione rerum* in 1576. While Sarpi's early scientific texts were clearly influenced by Aristotle, Contarini's *De perfectione rerum* avoided systematic recourse to the Stagirite and it has been suggested that Contarini in fact favoured Plato.[3] Even if this was the case, Sarpi and Contarini had many things in common: they frequented the same school in early 1560s, remained friends throughout their lives, and became central figures in Venice's battle against the papacy. There was a temporary estrangement between them when Sarpi joined the Servite order and spent several years in Mantua and Milan. In the meanwhile, Contarini studied at Padua, like so many young Venetian patricians, and entered such scholarly coteries as the *Accademia degli Animosi*.[4]

After his return to Venice Sarpi quickly became a central figure in Venice's intellectual life. He collaborated with leading scientists such as Galileo and Girolamo Fabrizi d'Acquapendente (1533–1619), the professor of anatomy at Padua who was taught by Gabriele Falloppio, a student of Andreas Vesalius, and whose own students included William Harvey (1578–1657), the English physician famous for his description of the circulation of blood. Whether it was Harvey or Sarpi who discovered the valves of veins was for a long time a topic of interest to historians of science, but recent scholarship has ascribed the discovery to Acquapendente.[5] It is nonetheless evident that Sarpi's scholarly interests were extremely broad and according to Micanzio he had examined not only all the works of Plato and Aristotle, and those of other ancient philosophers, but also the doctrines of scholastic thinkers, including realists and nominalists.[6]

Galileo's presence at the University of Padua was of crucial importance to the learned circles of Venice. He influenced the scientific culture of Venice and the process was reciprocal in that he himself was pushed forward by Padua's vigorous Aristotelianism and by the patricians' enthusiasm for natural sciences. At the same time, Galileo's attitude towards Aristotelianism and the Peripatetics of Padua was ambiguous. In a letter to Fortunio Liceto Galileo claimed that in spite of some differences between him and Aristotle, the latter,

2 For the timing of Sarpi's treatise, see Cozzi 1996, p. xxxiv.

3 Tenenti 1959, pp. 157–158.

4 Cozzi 1995, pp. 46–47. Benzoni 1994, p. 526: Contarini never graduated from the university.

5 Griselini, *Memorie anedote*, pp. 18–25, argued that it was Sarpi who discovered the valves. See also, Cozzi 1984, p. 5; and Porter 2006, p. 138 who ascribes the discovery to Acquapendente.

6 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1305–1309, 1321–1322.

had he "returned to the world", would have rather considered Galileo to be his follower than those who, while trying to stay faithful to every word the Greek had said, created new concepts, which Aristotle "would never have dreamed of".[7] Galileo was more hostile towards Aristotelians than Aristotle, which as William Wallace has rightly pointed out were two different things.[8] In a letter written to Sarpi on 12 February 1611 Galileo appears to have been pleased that those mathematicians who had at first laughed at him, now acknowledged his work. At this point Galileo's only remaining enemies were the Peripatetics, especially those of Padua, over whom he could hardly expect victory.[9] One of the leading figures of this group was Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631), whom Galileo immortalized by using him as the model for Simplicio, the caricature of a Peripatetic and papist in the *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi*.[10]

In terms of scientific practice, the collaboration between Sarpi and Galileo seems to have been intensive.[11] Galileo acknowledged Sarpi's help in making further improvements to the telescope, which had recently been invented in the Netherlands. It is also possible that Sarpi made a considerable contribution to Galileo's astronomical work *Sidereus nuntius*, as Gaetano Cozzi has suggested. Galileo also praised Sarpi as a mathematician: "I can affirm without any exaggeration, that in Europe nobody surpasses him (Sarpi) in the knowledge of these (mathematical) sciences".[12] This remark is significant, since mathematics

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7 I quote from Gilbert 1963, p. 230.

8 Wallace 1983, p. 351.

9 Galileo, *Opere*, p. 908: "*al presente non provo altri contrari che i peripatetici, più parziali di Aristotele che egli medesimo non sarebbe, e sopra gli altri quelli di Padova sopra i quali io veramente non spero vittoria*". In general, for Galileo and Aristotelianism, see Wallace 1983.

10 Wallace 1988, p. 203 note 1. See also Schmitt 1983, p. 118 note 52.

11 For an interesting analysis of the relationship between Sarpi and Galileo, see Sosio 2006, pp. 205–233, who suggests that Sarpi's role was that of a "father and maestro", and that when the two studied for example problems like tide and optics, it may have been Sarpi who guided Galileo. For a rather different interpretation of their relationship, see Ferrante 2007, who argues that Sarpi's and Galileo's objectives were totally different, the first being a politician, the latter a scientist in the sense of a "militant intellectual" and hence eager to leave Venice, where he could not find friends with whom to fight for the scientific truth (which Ferrante seems to identify with Copernicus' theory of heliocentricity).

12 Cozzi 1979, p. 163: "*posso senza iperbole alcuna affermare che niuno l'avanza in Europa di cognitione di queste scienze* (*matematiche*)". For *Sidereus nuntius*, see pp. 192–194: Galileo did not acknowledge Sarpi's contribution to the observations and theories put forth in *Sidereus nuntius*. He returned to Florence in 1610 and wrote an amicable letter to Sarpi in the following year, but Sarpi's answer was reticent (even the handwriting is that of Micanzio, which suggests that Sarpi dictated the letter). Cozzi's interpretation of this was that Sarpi was offended by Galileo's ingratitude.

played a central role in the scientific revolution. Although Sarpi became increasingly involved in politics during the first decade of the seventeenth century, he continued to follow contemporary scientific discourse. For example, it has been argued that Sarpi informed Galileo about a new optical invention, which led to the construction of the telescope, and later helped Galileo to introduce the instrument to Venetian patricians.[13]

Galileo is renowned for his contribution to the scientific revolution, but it should be stressed that he was by no means alone in criticizing the Peripatetics, nor was he solely responsible for reshaping Aristotelian science. The Englishmen Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and William Gilbert (1544–1603) were also critical of scholasticism and sought a new scientific method, which proposed to shift the focus from books to actual natural phenomena. Bacon believed scholasticism was not only useless, but wicked. This hostility towards scholasticism was also propagated by radical Protestants who were often highly critical of Aristotle and scholastic philosophy.[14] That Sarpi admired William Gilbert's work on magnetism (*De magnete*, published in 1600) reflects his interest in new scientific methods and discoveries. The same can be said about Micanzio's admiration for Bacon, whom he considered "full of knowledge and learning politique, morall, and divine", a "great personage", someone he could "observe and reverence as a divine thing" of his age.[15] It is equally interesting that Sarpi never mentions Bacon, especially since copies of Bacon's essays were anticipated in Venice with a "greediness" that Micanzio could hardly describe.[16]

Sarpi met William Gilbert in Venice shortly after the publication of the *De magnete*. In *De magnete* Gilbert implied that Giambattista Della Porta (1535–1615), the leading Italian scholar of magnetism, may have received his knowledge on magnetism from Sarpi. Gilbert must have read Della Porta's *Della magia naturale*, in which the latter acknowledged his debt to Sarpi, from whom he had learned "many things", and who "was interested in the same speculation"

13 Swerdlow 1998, pp. 244–245: "In late 1608 Galileo's friend Paolo Sarpi heard a rumor of an optical device, recently invented in the Netherlands, that made distant objects appear close, and by May of 1609 he must have alerted Galileo . . . he (Galileo) arranged through Sarpi a demonstration for the Venetian Senate". Unfortunately, Swerdlow does not provide any footnotes, only a summary of sources and further readings.

14 Hill 1980, pp. 15, 86, 90. On page 91 Hill states that "Bacon saw Aristotle as Antichrist". See, however, Lindberg 1990, pp. 3–5, according to whom Bacon respected both Plato and Aristotle.

15 Micanzio, *Lettere*, pp. 57, 127; for Micanzio's admiration for Bacon, see also pp. 135, 140, 167, 173, 196–197, 204, 235, 242, 259, 275, 293, 311.

16 Micanzio, *Lettere*, p. 77.

as him.[17] Sarpi had met Della Porta in Venice already in the early 1580s and again in Naples, which Sarpi visited during his stay in Rome in 1585–1588. Later on, Della Porta praised Sarpi's "erudition and subtlety", but Sarpi seems to have been unimpressed by Della Porta's theory of magnetism.[18] In 1603 he wrote to Luigi Lollino that Gilbert was the first author to write about magnetism properly, while all others who had approached the topic had merely "stammered". Sarpi observed that even Gilbert could improve his work, but nevertheless concluded that "the man and the book are worthy of eternal memory".[19] Micanzio complained in 1617 (and again in 1618) that it was very difficult to find a copy of Gilbert's *De magnete* in Venice, but Sarpi managed to read it thoroughly soon after its publication. It is clear that Sarpi considered Gilbert's book the best available study on magnetism and in 1607 he asserted to Jacques Leschassier that he still held "Gilbert's opinion" on the phenomenon. Micanzio shared Sarpi's admiration for Gilbert and argued that there were only "two things that are new of my knowledge: Gilbertus *De magnete* and my Lord Bacon".[20]

Although not a key figure in the history of science, Sarpi was very interested in what we refer to as the scientific revolution of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His admiration for Gilbert's *De magnete* is important, since many scholars consider *De magnete* not only anti-Aristotelian, but also a pioneering work of "modern experimental science".[21] Sarpi was both fascinated and puzzled by Gilbert's scientific method. In 1602, two years after the publication of *De magnete*, he wrote to Galileo:

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17 Sosio 2006, pp. 189–190. In general, for Sarpi and magnetism, see Sosio 2006, pp. 189–196; Sosio's note to *pensiero* no. 669, pp. 509–511; Cozzi 1979, pp. 161–163.; Griselini 1760, pp. 31–39.

18 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1296, see also the notes 12 and 13 by Corrado Vivanti on the same page and Da Pozzo 1968, pp. 13–14 and note 1. For the first encounter between Sarpi and Della Porta, see Sosio 2006, p. 190; Sosio 1986, p. 166; Formichetti 1999, p. 260.

19 Sarpi, *Lettere*, vol. I, pp. 10–11: "*Della calamita, tutti quelli che hanno toccato qualche cosa, hanno balbutito: questo è il primo che ne scriva . . . nondimeno l'uomo e l'opera sono degni di eterna memoria*".

20 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 11 December 1607, p. 6: "*Perseveravi in Gilberti sententia in qua adhuc permaneo*". See also, Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Jerôme Groslot de l'Isle, 12 June 1608, p. 16, in which Sarpi noted that during "this century" only the French mathematician Franciscus Vieta (1540–1603) and Gilbert had written about "*cosa sua propria*", about things they really knew well; For Micanzio and *De magnete*, see Micanzio, *Lettere*, pp. 67, 73, 80.

21 Sosio's note to *pensiero* no. 184, p. 172 (he quotes Marie Rose, *Il Rinascimento scientifico 1450–1630*, Milano 1973, p. 160). This is repeated in Pumfrey 1991, p. 66; and Sosio 2006, p. 189.

> But how has he (Gilbert) found his way? Through experiments or reason? Not through experiments . . . neither it seems to me that through reason . . . I beg You, sir, to take my difficulties into consideration and to compensate the insufficiency of our author, who has kept silent about the causes of the most obscure things that there are: at least he could have said how he has attained the knowledge . . . I desire to make experiments on this inclination.[22]

Sarpi was intent upon comprehending Gilbert's method and to find out the actual causes behind magnetism. His interest in the topic is confirmed by three later letters to Leschassier, in which Sarpi referred to experiments the latter had made on the inclination of a magnetic needle.[23] It seems that these experiments were precisely those which Sarpi desired to make already in 1602. Perhaps Sarpi's bewilderment over *De magnete* had something to do with the fact that Gilbert's research was inspired more by navigators and instrument makers than by traditional natural philosophy, as has been pointed out.[24] Sarpi was likely more dependent on books and medieval scholarship, although, as Giambattista della Porta and the historian of Venetian literature Marco Foscarini (1696–1763) observed, he performed experiments relating to magnetism already several years before Gilbert published his book.[25] Nothing suggests that these experiments were fruitful, however, and if Sarpi ever wrote anything on magnetism, it has not survived.

Sarpi's *pensieri*, written over a period of more than 20 years, starting in 1578 and ending around the year 1600, were produced precisely during the period when scientific method was being revised by scholars such as Galileo and Gilbert. This is not to say that natural philosophy from earlier periods had not sought to overcome the limits of Aristotelian philosophy: already in the early decades of the sixteenth century thinkers such as Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469–1533), Henricus Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) and Paracelsus (1493–1541) had criticized some aspects in Aristotle and showed

22 Cozzi 1979, p. 162: "*Ma egli* (*Gilbert*) *come ha truovato il suo modo? Per esperienze o per raggione? Non per esperienze . . . Non mi par manco che per raggione . . . Prego V.S. che habbia un poco di considerazione sopra le mie difficoltà, et sopplisca al mancamento del nostro auttore, il quale ha taciuto le causse delle più oscure cose che siano: almeno havesse detto come ne è venuto in cognitione . . . desidero far esperienza di questa inclinatione*".

23 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, pp. 4, 6, 7, letters of 4 September 1607 and 11 December 1607, the third is without a precise date. For the experiments in question, see Cozzi 1979, pp. 162–163.

24 Eamon 1994, p. 8.

25 Sosio's note to *pensiero* no. 669, pp. 509–511.

scepticism towards traditional philosophical analysis. Paracelsus, for instance, emphasized the importance of observation, experience and mechanical arts.[26] Still earlier, Ramon Lull (1232–1315) had aspired to gain knowledge in an "almost mechanical way". Moreover, Roger Bacon (1214–1294) argued that mathematics was superior to all other sciences, although he conceded that in practice experimental science was more important, because it turned the truth into something visible and more tangible than a mathematical truth could ever be.[27]

In Venice too there had been scientists who criticized Artistotelianism before Galileo arrived in Padua. In 1554 a young Venetian scientist and mathematician Giambattista Benedetti (1530–1590)—an admirer of Archimedes and Copernicus and a student of Niccolò Tartaglia (1500–1557)—published his *Demonstratio proportionum motuum localium contra Aristotilem et omnes philosophos*, in which he attacked Aristotle and his followers accusing them of excessive trust in knowledge based on sensation. Although Benedetti soon left Venice and spent the rest of his life in Parma and Torino,[28] his contribution is important in that it constitutes an early example of Venetian anti-Aristotelianism, and because Benedetti had a notable influence on some contemporary and later mathematicians.[29] Two better-known philosophers and alumni of the University of Padua, Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) and Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), also criticized Aristotelian physics and cosmology already in the 1550's and 1560's. Cardano was influenced by Pietro Pomponazzi and Erasmus of Rotterdam, while Telesio in turn influenced Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella.[30]

Thinkers like Cardano, Bruno and Campanella were interested in a great variety of philosophical traditions, including for example cabalism, alchemy, astrology and hermeticism. As is well known, Sarpi too was extremely varied in his interests. The catalogue of his own books, which includes all major authors of ancient Greece and Rome, reveals an intensely curious nature. The catalogue lists several editions of Aristotle (e.g. *Opera cum commento Averois*), Plato's *Opera*, works by Galen, Hippocrates, Euclid and Ptolemy (e.g. *Almagestum*), as well as Diogenes Laërtius, Lucretius, Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus, Livy and many literary writers from Homer to Juvenal. Numerous scholastics are also

26 Copenhaver 1988, pp. 290–291.

27 Gilson 1938, pp. 28–31.

28 Cappelletti 1966, pp. 260–261.

29 Maccagni 1983, pp. 718–719, 723–724. According to Maccagni, however, the scope of Benedetti's book did not extend to the great themes of the Aristotelian natural philosophy and there was still a long way to go in order to arrive at Galileo's scientific theories.

30 Ingegno 1988, pp. 248–252.

present: Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Jacques Almain and Domingo de Soto, for example.[31]

In spite of his scholastic upbringing, Sarpi's scholarly interests were not limited to the Aristotelian tradition. His library also contained works by humanists such as Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Alessandro Piccolomini, and, last but not least, Lorenzo Valla's *Dialectica . . . ubi multa adversus Aristotelem, Boetium, Porphyrium etc . . . disputandur*, an attack on Aristotle and Scholastic logic in favour of rhetorics. He also owned the *Discussionum peripateticarum*, a critical history of Aristotelianism, written by the Neoplatonic philosopher Francesco Patrizi, and mid-sixteenth-century classics such as Copernicus' *Revolutionum caelestium* and Vesalius' *Anatomia*, Lipsius' *Epistolica institutio* and a minor work by Pietro Pomponazzi (*De intensione et remissione*). In total the catalogue of Sarpi's books comprises 300 works. The final entry to the catalogue is the *Index librorum prohibitorum* of 1596. Its inclusion testifies to Sarpi's sense of humour, because he had to prepare the catalogue for the Holy Office as they were controlling illegal books in 1600. Since Sarpi possessed a copy of the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, we might speculate that he excluded some prohibited books from the catalogue (Pomponazzi's *De immortalitate animae* and Machiavelli's writings may well have been such). At least five more books mentioned in the catalogue are significant in terms of Sarpi's scientific thought. These are *De perfectione rerum* by Sarpi's friend Nicolò Contarini, *De miraculis naturae* by Giambattista della Porta, another friend of his, *De malo usu medendi* by Girolamo Cardano, *Gnomonica* by Cristoforo Clavio—one of the Jesuit mathematicians who eventually acknowledged the merits of Galileo's work—and *Diversarum speculationum* (1585) by Giambattista Benedetti, which played a key role in the birth of the new science.[32]

At certain points Sarpi disagreed with Aristotle even before he was influenced by pioneering scientists such as Galileo or Benedetti. For instance, in an early *pensiero* dating from 1578 Sarpi rejected Aristotle's claim that all elements except fire have weight and supported his argument with the example of water. Sarpi reasoned that a person at the bottom of the sea would not feel the weight of the water above him, from which it followed that water does not weight anything, that is, it does not aspire towards the centre of the earth. The same example was taken up two years earlier in Pisa by Girolamo Borro, a teacher to the young Galileo, who in turn used it in his *De motu* sometime after 1590. Giordano Bruno made a similar reference some years before Galileo

31 Masetti Zannini 1970, *passim*.

32 Masetti Zannini 1970, *passim*.

in his *La cena de le ceneri*, although the idea seems to originate form Hero of Alexandria, who in turn found his inspiration from Archimedes.[33] The example of weightless water was common in sixteenth-century scholarly circles and in its own small way confirms the growing criticism of Aristotelian science. In his early *pensieri* Sarpi opposed or modified Aristotle's theories on the mixability of metals, the manner in which fire acts on different materials, and the transformation of the matter through generation and corruption,[34] although his departures from orthodox Aristotelianism were more significant in questions related to knowledge and motion, as discussed below. These differences notwithstanding, Sarpi was never openly hostile towards Aristotle and, like a majority of sixteenth-century scientists, his terminology remained thoroughly Aristotelian.[35]

At the beginning of 1580's Sarpi devoted himself for a period of three years to physical and scientific studies and made a number of contributions, in particular to the field of anatomy.[36] After having returned from Rome in 1588 he began to frequent the *ridotto Morosini*, where he discussed various philosophical, political and religious problems with leading politicians and intellectuals of the republic. In the following decade he continued to frequent the *ridotto*, but his scholarly interests shifted from natural sciences to historical and philosophical studies. This change anticipated the end of Sarpi's habit of making scientific notes in the form of the *pensieri*. From the turn of the century onwards Sarpi's writings dealt almost exclusively with political, historical, moral and religious matters, while his comments on natural sciences were reduced to occasional remarks in his correspondence. However, his readiness to replace natural sciences with *vita activa* may not merely have been a reaction to the overwhelming brilliance of a Galileo or a Gilbert, as has been suggested.[37] Since Sarpi identified service to the state with service to God, as argued in this book, his involvement in politics issued from his piety and his belief in a divinely preordained course of events. Sarpi became involved in *vita activa*, because he was chosen to do so by the senate, which, according to him, represented the will of God.

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33 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 13, p. 21; Sosio's note to the *pensiero*; Sosio 1971, pp. 322–323.

34 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, nos. 103–104, 112–116, 126. In her note to *pensiero* 103 Luisa Cozzi remarks that in these *Pensieri* Sarpi conserved the point of departure and the terminology of the School of Oxford, but tried to surpass them by resorting to the principal elements of Epicurean atomism, on which he attempted to base a general mechanistic philosophy.

35 Cozzi 1980, p. 366: besides Aristotle, Sarpi used terminology adopted from Galen and Hippocrates.

36 Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1291–1294. See also Cozzi 1969, pp. 11–13; Vivanti 1974, pp. xlviii–xlix.

37 Cozzi 1979, p. 163.

Sarpi's letters to Luigi Lollino reveal a strong dissonance between our image of Sarpi as a scientist of scholastic background on the one hand and a man of sufficient humanistic capacity to enjoy a good translation of a classical author on the other: "I am passing time by reading Plutarch of Jaces Amiot", Sarpi wrote in 1603, "which seems to be more beautiful than Plutarch himself, and I feel sad since it has not been translated as well by an Italian".[38] As befitting of a proper humanist, Sarpi compared the aesthetic value of Amiot's French version with the Italian translation of Plutarch. In the same letter he happily declared it certain that Joseph Justus Scaliger's (1540–1609) edition of Eusebius would be available in the coming book fair. This suggests that Sarpi was a polymath who moved with great ease from the blood-stained theatres of anatomy to the refreshing hills of Parnassus and back. At the same time, this is why his scientific activities remained dilettantish, and why he so successfully morphed from a disinterested scholar into a passionate politician. We should not, however, underestimate Sarpi's scientific acumen. There were natural scientists who considered him one of the greatest in the field. Indeed, in 1658 the French philosopher Samuel Sorbière could write to Thomas Hobbes that in future "the Arts will return to life; the Sciences will regain their proper place; and the influence of the stars . . . will produce Gilberts, Bacons, Harveys, Sarpis, Galileos, Mersennes, Descartes, and Gassendis once more".[39]

Epistemology and Method

The problems of epistemology and scientific method were central not only to Sarpi's thought, but also to the more general scientific discourse of the period. In Sarpi's case, epistemology was built on a material interpretation of sensation. While Jean Bodin allowed one of the conversants in his *Colloquium Heptaplomeres* claim that "the sight of the mind is sharper for seeing than that of our eyes", Sarpi rejected any extra-sensory means of achieving knowledge. This approach was in line with Sarpi's English contemporary Hobbes, according to whom "there is no conception in man's mind, which hath not at first,

38 Sarpi, *Lettere*, vol. I, 1 February 1603, p. 12: *"io mi trattengo a leggere Plutarco di Jaces Amiot, che mi pare più bello di Plutarco stesso, e mi doglio che non sia tradotto talmente da un italiano"*.

39 Hobbes, *Correspondence*, vol. I, Samuel Sorbière to Hobbes on 1 February 1658, p. 491: "*les Arts resusciteront; les Sciences reprendront leur place; & une plus douce influence des Astres . . . produira derechef des Gilberts, des Baccons, des Haruaees, des Fra Paolo, des Galilées, des Mersennes, des Descartes, & des Gassendis*".

totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense".[40] However, Sarpi did not expect the sight of a human eye to be perfect. In keeping with ancient sceptics, he argued that our senses function differently depending on the condition we are in, and "this is proved by the taste of the sick and the sight of the frenetic".[41] He maintained that there was no perfect correspondence between perception and reality, or, between subject and object. In spite of this deficiency, all our knowledge was based on sensation and the mind of a man with no senses at all would be a *tabula rasa*:

> because the simple sensibles are known through the bare senses and the common sensibles through the reasoning founded on sensory knowledge, he who does not have the senses, cannot possibly know any of the cognoscible concepts.[42]

Here Sarpi keyed into a long philosophical tradition of theories of sensation, the foundations of which were laid by Aristotle's *De anima*. In fact, most early Aristotelians based their epistemological theories on sensation and this continued to be the case in Sarpi's time. The "common sensibles", which Sarpi mentioned in the *pensiero* above, were a little more complicated than the "simple sensibles" (or, simple objects), namely, things like motion, rest, shape, size and number.[43] In order to attain knowledge of them man required not only external senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch), but also internal ones. The scholastic distinction between external and internal senses was problematic for many Aristotelian philosophers who could not reach a consensus as

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40 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 60 (Salomon's line); Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 1, p. 85.

41 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 2, p. 5: "*Fa prova di ciò il gusto degl'ammalati, e la vista de' frenetici*". For a brief survey on the ancient theories of sensation, see the annotation of Libero Sosio on pages 5–8. Pine 1986, p. 21, remarks that also according to Averroes and Pomponazzi different physical and emotional states could produce different sensations. See also Sanchez, *Quod nihil scitur*, p. 66: "everything appears red to an inflamed eye" ("*oculo inflammato, omnia rubra apparent*").

42 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 4, p. 11: "*Essendo che li sensibili semplici sono conosciuti dalli sensi nudi, e li sensibili comuni son conosciuti dal discorso fondato sopra la cognizion de' sensi, chi non ha sensi non può in alcun modo conoscer alcuna delle intenzioni conoscibili*". I have translated the "*discorso*" as "reasoning" and the "*intenzioni*" as "concepts", instead of "discourse" and "intentions", following the observations of Luisa Cozzi in her annotations to the *Pensieri* nos. 3 and 4, pp. 9, 13. For the lack of correspondence between the subject and the object in Sarpi's theory, see Sosio 1996b, pp. 562–563.

43 Park 1988, pp. 470, 474.

regards the number of the internal senses.[44] For example, in his *Margarita philosophica* (1503) the German humanist Gregor Reisch (1467–1525) specified five different internal senses: common sense, imagination, fantasy, estimation and memory.[45]

Over the course of sixteenth-century natural philosophers began to cleanse epistemological theories from the burden of earlier commentaries on Aristotle. For example, some writers excluded cogitation and estimation from their list of internal senses, but many remained puzzled as to whether there were several or just one internal sense. According to the Paduan philosopher Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589), Aristotle had proposed three senses: common sense, fantasy and memory.[46] Sarpi, however, referred simply to "reasoning", omitting concepts like 'common sense' or 'fantasy'. As far as the nature of reason (or internal sense) is concerned, Sarpi in fact made a break with Aristotle and Peripatetics, since, unlike them, he did not acknowledge an intellect, which would intuitively understand all common sensibles. More to the point, in Sarpi's view intellect was active and *constructed* the knowledge or understanding of common sensibles. Thus, intellect differed from senses, which merely recorded simple sensibles. While Aristotle acknowledged a passive intellect, which was illuminated by the active intellect, Sarpi acknowledged only an intellect which was active and actually *made* the thing intelligible:[47]

> our sensory virtue is certainly passive and it receives in it and in its instrument the things it senses . . . but we possess another cognitive virtue, which is active, and which is called rational, and it makes the *specie* of things by reasoning from one thing sensed by a sense to another thing unsensed by the same (sense).[48]

In the same *pensiero* Sarpi referred to the example of fire: when the eye sees a fire, its reception is limited to detection of light, but since touch usually already has its own experience of fire and has sensed it to be hot, the intellect actively combines these two sense experiences and forms a knowledge or

44 Luisa Cozzi's note to the *pensiero* no. 39, in Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 52.

45 Park 1988, pp. 470–471.

46 Park 1988, pp. 480–481 and the note 46.

47 Santinello 1983, pp. 931–935.

48 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 101, p. 125: "*La nostra virtù sensitiva è certamente passiva e riceve in sé e nel suo strumento le cose, che sente . . . Ma un' altra virtù conoscitiva possediamo, la qual è attiva, e questa discorsiva si dice, che fa le specie delle cose, argomentando da una sentita dal senso ad altra dal medesimo non sentita*".

understanding of fire. In Sarpi's view, thus, knowledge resulted from the mechanical or associative act of connecting sense data and this process took place in the active intellect.

In order to explain "the physical gap between the object and the sense organ and the metaphysical gap between the sense organ and the soul"—as Katherine Park put it—the Scholastics employed the concept of '*specie*' (or '*forma*', or '*fantasma*').[49] By *specie* they understood an image that moved from the object to the sense organ. Reisch wrote of this image that "although the sense object cannot be received by the sense organ in its essence on account of its materiality it produces an image which the sense can receive and by which it can be perceived".[50] The term '*specie*' was in common use in early seventeenth-century Venice. In a letter of January 1603 Sarpi told Luigi Lollino about a recent bout of extremely cold weather in Venice and remarked cheerfully that "I could not even read, for the *specie* of the letters froze before reaching my sight".[51] At times Sarpi used the word '*specie*' with the additional concepts of 'universal' and 'intelligible'. Hobbes did not favour such terms. According to him sense was nothing but an image of the object, caused "by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of external things upon our eyes, eares, and other organs". Aristotelian concepts such as "visible species", "audible species" and "intelligible species", Hobbes continued, were but "insignificant speech".[52] In spite of his occasional reshaping of Aristotelian ideas, Sarpi remained greatly indebted to Aristotelian terminology. After having stated that our senses recognize their proper objects instantaneously, Sarpi specified that "making the universal *specie* or recognizing the common sensibles involves the reason".[53] If the common sensibles were proportional objects that were understood with reason, what, then, were the universal *species*? For Sarpi the answer appears to have been that universal *species* were universal concepts or ideas made from a particular *specie*, or figure: "with separating from the abovementioned particular *specie* all those concepts, which one cannot always reason in the principal

49 Park 1988, p. 471.

50 I cite from Park 1988, p. 471. On *specie*, see also the annotations of Luisa Cozzi in *Pensieri*, pp. 50, 52.

51 Sarpi, *Lettere*, vol. I, 20 January 1603, p. 11: "*Io non poteva manco leggere, che le specie delli caratteri s'agghiacciavano prima che giungere alla vista*".

52 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 1, pp. 86–87. For Hobbes' criticism of and indebtedness to Aristotle, see Spragens 1973, pp. 38–47 and *passim*.

53 Sarpi. *Pensieri*, no. 3, p. 8: "*nel far la specie universale o conoscer i sensibili comuni si mischia la ragione*".

thing . . . the universal *specie* is made from the figure . . . and that is why it is said that the universals are made by abstraction".[54]

Sarpi's naturalistic, atomistic and mechanical worldview might appear at first glance entirely at odds with a term such as 'abstraction'. Yet elsewhere he again referred to the so-called "abstracts", and argued that they were, in reality, "made by junction", and that it was misleading to call them abstracts.[55] These abstract universals were made by the mind's capacity for "separating the united things" and by its "virtue to unite the separated". With these functions the human mind "collects the particulars and makes the universal".[56] By arguing that the universal was made in man's mind, Sarpi took sides in the old Scholastic dispute between realists and nominalists. Whereas realists regarded universals as something which really existed outside the mind, nominalists maintained that the universals (or universal *species*) were mere concepts of mind and did not as such correspond to the objective reality.[57] In a *pensiero* dating from 1580s Sarpi reflected on this question and argued that,

> Nothing, then, has its own and proper being except the singular. The others are reality with regard to some conditions, and then they are the very singular, while with regard to other conditions they are nothing but work of the mind. But who takes them as an aggregate of all the conditions, which becomes integrated by that what is real and (by that what is) of mind, they are the singular under this concept. Thus they are no fiction, because the singular is apt to be considered like that, and the mind is apt to consider it that way; as when one sees two things, which are seen out of place either because of a reflection or a refraction, that is no fiction, because the thing is apt to be seen that way and the eye is apt to see it like that.[58]

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54 Sarpi, *Arte*, p. 581: "*col separare dalla suddetta specie particolare tutte quelle intenzioni, che non si possono argomentare sempre nella cosa principale . . . si fa la specie universale della figura . . . e per questo si dicono li universali esser fatti per astrazione*".

55 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 370, p. 286: "*tali cose facciansi dalla mente per astrazione, onde sono state chiamate astratti, non di meno per congiunzione si fanno. Anzi 'l dire che si fanno per astrazione causa errore*". See also *Arte*, p. 582.

56 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 369, p. 285: "*Oltre la virtù di separar le cose unite, ha la mente virtù d'unir le separate . . . Così raccoglie i particolari, e fa l'universale*".

57 Maurer 1999, pp. 62–87.

58 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 361, p. 280: "*Niuna cosa dunque ha esser proprio suo fuorché il singolare. Le altre sono realtà quanto ad alcune condizioni, e allora sono il singolare stesso, né quanto ad altre condizioni sono più che opera della mente. Ma chi le piglia per l'aggregato delle condizioni tutte, il quale da ciò che è real et* rationis *integrato viene, sono il singolare sotto questo*

Sarpi adhered to nominalism and stated clearly that only singulars really exist, although they could also be understood with all the abstractions associated with them. This was because the singular was "apt to be considered like that", and moreover, "the mind is apt to consider it that way". Sarpi's concept of the intellect, which actively constructed the common sensibles instead of intuitively comprehending them, was compatible with his nominalism, since the intuitive comprehension of common sensibles (or universals) would have suggested that these phenomena really exist as similar objects as the simple sensibles, which we understand immediately through our senses. That Sarpi was a nominalist is also suggested by his assessment of William of Ockham (1287–1347), one of his favourite philosophers. In 1608 Sarpi wrote to François Hotman of Ockham that "if one removes his barbarisms, (he) is a very judicious writer", and he then concluded that "I have valued him above all the scholastics".[59] Sarpi's admiration for Ockham was undermined by his criticism of "barbarisms" in the latter's writings, a fact, which provides further evidence of Sarpi's humanistic disposition: as Charles Trinkaus has observed, one of the main concerns of the humanists was to purify "barbarisms" from scholastic texts.[60]

The question of universals was a key problem for those thinkers who were interested in epistemic processes. This was a puzzling problem already for Duns Scotus, Ockham and their contemporaries, but also for Sarpi, because the mere idea of simple and common sensibles did not offer a sufficient explanation of the cognitive operations of the mind. It was obvious that man was intellectually capable of much more than just recognizing simple and proportional objects by using his external senses. He was also capable of abstract thinking, and it was here that the concept of a 'universal' was intended to clarify the mental processes of acquiring knowledge. Besides simple and common sensibles there were universal *species* and, therefore, two different levels of understanding. Ockham, for example, distinguished between two cognitive faculties, which he labeled "intuitive knowledge" and "abstract knowledge".[61]

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concetto. Perciò finzioni non sono, perché il singolar è atto ad esser considerato così, ed a così considerarlo è atta la mente; sì come quando si veggon due cose, o fuor di luogo per riflesso o rifratto si veggono, non è finzione, perché la cosa è atta ad esser veduta così e l'occhio a così vederla".

59 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to François Hotman, 22 July 1608, p. 173: "*Guilielmo Occamo, del quale chi levasse la barbarie, haverebbe uno scrittore molto giuditioso. Io l'ho stimato sopra tutti li scolastici*".

60 Trinkaus 1956, p. 149.

61 Courtenay 1984, p. 44; Park 1988, p. 481 note 48.

The Scholastic epistemology that Sarpi had adopted was based on two principles: firstly, on sensation, which provided intuitive knowledge, and secondly, on reasoning, which provided abstract knowledge.

For sixteenth-century scholars it was commonplace to distinguish between the superior and perfect divine knowledge and the inferior and more or less deficient human knowledge. Francesco Barozzi believed that mathematics provided the most certain knowledge accessible to human intellect and, as such, formed the bedrock of all human knowledge.[62] At the same time, he acknowledged that mathematical knowledge fell short of religious certitude, as we can judge from a passage from his *Opusculum*: "knowledge of divine things is more certain than knowledge of mathematical things". On the next page Barozzi asserted that "as to the certitude, mathematical science is inferior to divine", and still in another passage he argued that "amongst all sciences mathematics holds the first grade in certitude . . . in respect to the divine second, in respect to the natural (sciences) first".[63] No matter how elaborate the theories were that scientists contrived in their studies, Barozzi's viewpoint implied that understanding of religious matters remained the purest form of human knowledge, since it originated from God and was supported by Him. In Barozzi's view, God's knowledge itself was perfect and superior to any human form of understanding.

Galileo, who owned a copy of Barozzi's *Opusculum*, shared this opinion. Regardless of whether a man was an emperor or a private person, for Galileo his power was "nothing" when compared to the divine omnipotence. Only in the innumerable works of nature could one see the infinite wisdom, which made it evident that "the divine knowledge is infinite times infinite".[64] In his *Dialogo* Galileo let Salviati—the character who represented Galileo's own views—explain to Simplicio and Sagredo that there were two ways of understanding; "intensive" and "extensive" (or qualitative and quantitative). Since there was an infinite number of intelligible things, and since man might understand a thousand of them, "human understanding is like nothing . . . because in respect to infinity a thousand is like a zero". However, Galileo went on to argue

62 Benzoni 1994, p. 566.

63 Barozzi, *Opusculum*, p. 13v: "*ostendat ibi Plato cognitionem rerum divinarum cognitione rerum mathematicarum certiorem esse*"; p. 14v: "*mathematica scientia inferiore certitudine sit, quam divina, quod ostendit Proclus*"; p. 33r: "*primum . . . respectu omnium scientiarum mathematica tenet certitudinis gradum . . . respectu divinae secundum, respectu naturalis primum*".

64 Galileo, *Dialogo*, pp. 108–109: "*talché si può concludere, il saper divino esser infinite volte infinito*".

that "the human intellect understands some of them as perfectly and with such an absolute certainty, as nature itself, and such things are the pure mathematical sciences". The divine intellect understood everything about mathematics, but in those few mathematical propositions of which man had knowledge, his knowledge was "equal to the divine in objective certainty, because it grasps the necessity, over which there seems to be no greater certainty".[65] What this means is that in Galileo's opinion there were moments in mathematical sciences when man could reach a level of understanding equal to divine knowledge. The key to this sort of absolute certainty was in necessity: when the conclusion followed the premises necessarily, as in a mathematical proposition, there was no doubt left about the truth of the statement.

From the point of view of scholars like Galileo, mathematics was the area where the human and the divine coincided. The equality between human and divine knowledge in mathematical sciences was nevertheless limited to the question of certainty. Galileo pointed out that the ways of acquiring knowledge were different in God and in men. God's way was "absolutely more excellent than ours, which proceeds with reasoning and with passages from conclusion to conclusion, while his way is a simple intuition", so that he understands "without temporal reasoning" all infinite things, which, since being infinite, "are perhaps just one in their essence and in the divine mind".[66] The last remark recalls Giordano Bruno's metaphysical idea of everything's fundamental oneness. In Bruno's view the universe was "one, infinite, immobile".[67] His metaphysics was based on a combination of atomism and pantheism, according to which "God is the monad of monads, indeed, the entity of entities". The novelty in Bruno's thought was to merge the metaphysics of the one and atomistic philosophy, since traditionally these two had been kept separate. Bruno's

65 Galileo, *Dialogo*, pp. 109–110: "*l'intender umano è come nullo . . . perché mille rispetto all'infinità è come un zero . . . l'intelletto umano ne intende alcune così perfettamente, e ne ha così assoluta certezza, quanto se n'abbia l'istessa natura; e tali sono le scienze matematiche pure . . . la cognizione agguagli la divina nella certezza obiettiva, poiché arriva a comprenderne la necessità, sopra la quale non par che possa esser sicurezza maggiore*". The character of Sagredo was based on the Venetian patrician and Galileo's (and Sarpi's) friend Giovanni Francesco Sagredo (1571–1620), while Simplicio represented a traditional Aristotelian scientist.

66 Galileo, *Dialogo*, pp. 110–111: "*è sommamente più eccellente del nostro, il quale procede con discorsi e con passaggi di conclusione in conclusione, dove il Suo è di un semplice intuito . . . l'intelletto divino . . . comprende, senza temporaneo discorso, tutta la infinità di quelle passioni . . . che poi finalmente, per esser infinite, forse sono una sola nell'essenza loro e nella mente divina*".

67 Bruno, *De la causa, principio e uno*, p. 210: "*è dunque l'universo uno, infinito, inmobile*".

mathematics was based on atomism and a Euclidean use of definitions, axioms and theorems. His ontological reality consisted of infinite and indivisible quantity, to which mathematics too had to be adapted. It has been argued that in this sense Bruno's thinking provided the basis for what would eventually develop into an entirely new kind of mathematics.[68]

Mathematics had a pivotal role in the scientific revolution. Although the emancipation of mathematics had a strong Platonic veil—as was the case with Francesco Barozzi, as we have seen—it was nonetheless carried out by scientists and philosophers who knew their Aristotle. One advocate of such an emancipation was Giambattista Benedetti who discussed the importance of mathematics in his correspondence with Dominicus Pisanus, who in his reply confirmed that one could not "attain philosophy without knowledge of divine mathematics".[69] Benedetti influenced many later mathematicians, including Cristoforo Clavio, Johannes Kepler, Marin Mersenne, Galileo and Sarpi (who owned a copy of Benedetti's *Diversarum speculationum*—published in 1585—and mentions Benedetti twice in his *Pensieri*). His early works included *De resolutione* (1553) and *Demonstratio proportionum* (1554), which was subsequently plagiarized by the scholarly priest Jean Taisner in his *Opusculum perpetua memoria dignissimum* (1562).[70]

The significance of mathematics to thinkers like Benedetti, Barozzi, Bruno and Galileo was summarized by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) who wrote in 1599 that "indeed, what is there on man's mind except numbers and quantities? These are the only things we understand correctly, and if it is not impious to say it, with the similar knowledge as God".[71] According to Barozzi the similarity between man and God was to be found in philosophy, while within the field of philosophy it was mathematics that held the supreme place. In his speech to students at Padua in 1557 Barozzi declared that the "nobility and utility of mathematical sciences" for the "most diligent adolescents" was evident.[72] Galileo too defended the role of mathematics in

68 Bönker-Vallon 1999, pp. 75, 77, 90; the quotation is on page 75, note 23: "*Deus est monadum monas, nempe entium entitas*".

69 Wallace 1984, p. 235.

70 Cappelletti 1966, pp. 260–261; Benzoni 1994, pp. 566–567; Sosio 1971, pp. 330–331; Wallace 1984, pp. 137, 232.

71 I quote from Sarpi, *Pensieri*, Sosio's footnote on page 737: "*Che cosa c'è infatti nella mente dell'uomo tranne i numeri e le quantità? Questi solo comprendiamo rettamente, e se non è empio affermarlo, con lo stesso genere di conoscenza di Dio*".

72 Barozzi, *Oratio*, p. 6v: "*Est igitur philosophia homini cum Deo similitudo*"; p. 17r: "*Mathematicarum scientiarum nobilitatem atque utilitatem perspicuam vobis studiosissimi adolescentes esse arbitror*".

the university curriculum. In his letter to Sarpi on 12 February 1611 Galileo expressed his hope that a good mathematician will be chosen to succeed him in the vacant chair. The follower should be "held in high esteem", and a person "able to defend the dignity and the excellence of such a noble profession against those, who try to exterminate it, and who are not absent in Padua."[73]

Thomas Hobbes, in turn, maintained that geometry was the best source for certain knowledge. He argued in *Leviathan* that geometry was the only science, which begins with "definitions or explications of the names" it uses and hence its "conclusions" are "indisputable". Elsewhere Hobbes noted that the geometrician had complete knowledge of the objects of his study, because he himself drew "the lines and figures from which we reason" and therefore perfectly understood the causes behind the objects.[74] The claim that the geometrician—as a creator of an object—understands perfectly his creation might be a parallel of the idea that God understands everything perfectly and intuitively. In fact, Hobbes argued that geometry was "the onely science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind".[75] Sarpi, for his part, remained sceptical even about the certainty of mathematical knowledge. In the first place, he distinguished between what God knows and what men know: "gods know the true one and the infinity. We know the one . . . contingent and the number".[76] Sarpi acknowledged infinity, which was one and true (if it was not one, it would not be infinite), and known by gods (or God) alone. For him the knowledge of man, however, was limited to contingent particulars and to numbers. In some of his *pensieri* Sarpi claimed that only God knows all the causes of different phenomena, and, just like Galileo, he specified that God knew these causes intuitively, "without reasoning".[77] On the other hand, human knowledge was based on "hypotheses" and "consequences", a fact, which led Sarpi to reject even the certainty of mathematics:

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73 Galileo, *Opere*, pp. 910–911: "*persona di grande stima, ed atta a poter difendere la dignità ed eccellenza di così nobil professione contro a quelli che cercano di esterminarla, li quali in Padova non mancano*".

74 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 5, pp. 113–114; Jesseph 1996, p. 87. See also, Spragens 1973, pp. 33–34.

75 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 4, p. 105.

76 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, (mathematical propositions) p. 728: "*Li dei sano il vero uno e l'infinito. Noi l'uno ut* (sic) *contingente et il numero*".

77 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 270, p. 232: "*Iddio fa senza discorso*"; no. 136, p. 152: "*chi le sue cause tutte sappia. Questi peraltro è solo Iddio*"; no. 138, p. 153: "*a chi tutte conosce le cause, come è Dio, qualunque cosa è certa*".

> But even if one corrects as much as one wants every error, which is born from reasoning, given the dialectic way that is used, having confirmed the reasonings with the syllogistic form and the other way around . . . one should still doubt everything we conclude . . . as in the mathematics . . . especially if there is no proportion *nota ex natura intellectus*, our knowledge will be entirely *ex hypothesi et scientia consequentiarum*.[78]

Whereas Galileo may have seen mathematics as the area where the human and the divine converged, for Sarpi it was impossible to conceive of man partaking in divine knowledge. The doubt that Sarpi expressed about mathematical certitude reflected his Augustinian interpretation of man as a deficient and fallen creature.

Paduan philosophers had a long tradition of reflecting and developing scientific methodology. Indeed it was at Padua where Agostino Nifo in 1506 specified that there were four kinds of knowledge: 1) effect through senses (observation); 2) discovery of the cause through the effect (demonstration); 3) knowledge of the same cause by the intellect (demonstration *simplificiter*; 4) knowledge of that same effect *propter quid*, through a cause known certainly.[79] This fourfold schema is known as *regressus*-method and in addition to Nifo it was most famously championed by Jacopo Zabarella. The method was used to find causes by proceeding from effect to cause and then returning from the cause to the effect. The process was somewhat circular and Nifo himself became sceptical of the method in his later writings, implying that at times it provided only conjectural knowledge.[80] With the increasing emphasis on mathematics many sixteenth-century natural philosophers began to show interest in quantitative rather than qualitative problems and it has been noted that towards the end of the century scientists like Galileo focused more on recording observations than on finding causes.[81] The acknowledgment of the importance of observations paved the way for empiricism, which in Sarpi's case shows in his increased interest in history at the time of the interdict crisis.

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78 Sarpi, *Arte*, pp. 589–590: "*Ma correggasi quanto si vuole ogni errore, che nasca nel discorrere, atteso il modo dialettico, che s'usa, confermati i discorsi colla forma sillogistica e questa con quelli . . . resta sempre da dubbitare sopra ogni cosa che noi concluderemo . . . come nelle matematiche . . . Massime che se non v'è nessuna proporzione* nota ex natura intellectus*, il nostro sapere sarà tutto* ex hypothesi et scientia consequentiarum".

79 Randall 1940, p. 192.

80 Gaukroker 2006, pp. 41–44.

81 Schmitt 1983, p. 122.

In a *pensiero* written between 1583 and 1585 Sarpi reflected on different ways of "philosophizing" and stressed the importance of sense perception:

> There are four ways of philosophizing: the first is with the sole reason, the second is with the sole sense, the third is with the reason first and then with the sense, the fourth is beginning with the sense and continuing with the reason. The first is the worst, since that way one knows what one wants there to be, not what there really is. The third is bad, because often one adjusts that what there is to that what one wants there to be, instead of doing the opposite. The second is true, but crude and makes one know only little and rather the being than the cause. The fourth is the best we can have in this miserable life.[82]

In Sarpi's view the best scientific method began with sensory perception and continued with reasoning processes. This was in line with Galileo's interpretation of Aristotle's scientific method: in his *Dialogo* Galileo has Simplicio, the Peripatetic, say that according to Aristotle "the sense experiences have to be placed before any reasoning fabricated by the human intellect".[83] Aristotle did claim in his *De generatione animalium* that one should trust rather in observation than in reasoning and Galileo often referred to this passage in order to prove that the Stagirite too was an experimentalist, a fact which led John Randall to conclude that as far as methodology is concerned, Galileo was an orthodox Aristotelian.[84] This claim has nevertheless been refuted by Charles Schmitt.[85] It is of course difficult to define 'Aristotelian' in this context and at least in theory all early-modern scientists were Aristotelian in the sense that they studied Aristotle and the problems he had raised. At the same time, some

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82 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 146, p. 158: "*Vi sono quattro modi di filosofare: il primo colla sola ragione, il secondo col senso solo, il terzo colla ragione prima e poi il senso, il quarto dal senso incominciando e ultimando colla ragione. Pessimo è il primo, perché si sa quello che vorremmo che fosse, non quello che è; cattivo è il terzo, perché molte volte si tira quello che è a quello che si vorrebbe, in luogo di regolarci all'opposto; vero è il secondo, ma rozzo e fa saper poco, e più tosto l'esser che la causa; il quarto è l'ottimo che in questa misera vita possiam avere*". For the dating of this *pensiero*, see Santinello 1983, p. 930.

83 Galileo, *Dialogo*, p. 33: "*le sensate esperienze si dovessero anteporre a qualsivoglia discorso fabbricato da ingegno umano*".

84 Randall 1940, p. 183. See also, Galileo, *Dialogo*, p. 33 note 1; Olivieri 1983, p. 778.

85 Schmitt 1983, pp. 117–118. Schmitt questions "the generalisations put forward by Randall", including the claim that Galileo was an Aristotelian. According to Cohen 1994, p. 281, W.A. Wallace has subsequently attempted to revive Randall's view, which emphasized Aristotle's influence on the scientific revolution and on scientists such as Galileo.

of them adopted all or most of Aristotle's theories, while others made the effort to criticize and alter his propositions.

The physician William Harvey, for example, argued that the best method was to proceed from the more known to the less known, and that since we know best the universals, "the science indeed begins by reasoning from the universals to the particulars".[86] Sarpi argued the opposite. According to him science started from the particulars, from the simple sensibles. However, it would be misleading to suggest that Sarpi resorted exclusively to induction, or that Harvey's method was based on deduction, or that the latter was an Aristotelian scientist—and nothing else—while Sarpi was somehow above Aristotelian paradigms and methods. In fact, Sarpi used both induction and deduction, and, as we have seen, borrowed his terminology from Aristotle.

Early-modern scientists such as Galileo, Francis Bacon, René Descartes and Isaac Newton have long posed difficulties to historians.[87] Theirs was a period of significant paradigmatic changes in natural sciences. At the same time, innovations were often based on and expressed in the vocabularies of previous, even ancient theories. It is nonetheless possible to make some relatively clear distinctions. For example, while Descartes discarded the senses, Sarpi, Galileo and Hobbes based all knowledge on experience. Hobbes furthermore distinguished between two sorts of knowledge, one being "nothing else but sense, or knowledge original", the other being "called science or knowledge of the truth of propositions". The latter "is derived from understanding" and, Hobbes concluded, "both of these sorts are but experience".[88] In *Leviathan* Hobbes called the first "knowledge of fact" and referred to the latter as "the knowledge of consequences". Furthermore, the first was "absolute", while the latter was "conditional" and the kind of a knowledge that was "required in a philosopher".[89] Broadly speaking, this corresponds to Sarpi's theory of philosophizing, which began with sense knowledge about the simple sensibles and continued with the understanding of common sensibles and universals with the actively operating intellect. Both Sarpi and Hobbes can be seen as early advocates of sensationalism, which was subsequently developed further by John Locke (1632–1704) and his French follower Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1780).[90]

86 Schmitt 1983, p. 120 note 58: "*universalia nobis praecipue nota sint* (*ab universalibus enim ad particularia ratiocinando, oritur scientia*)".

87 McMullin 1990, pp. 27–92.

88 Hobbes, *The Elements of law*, chap. VI, p. 40.

89 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chaps. 6 and 9, pp. 115, 147–148.

90 For Locke, Condillac and sensationalism, see Goldstein 2003, pp. 133–134.

Although Sarpi did not mention the method of *regressus* in his *pensiero* 146 on the four ways of philosophizing, he preferred a method which proceeded from the more simple towards the more complicated, and which then returned back to the more simple in order to improve it. This was formulated in his *Arte del ben pensare*, written around 1609, approximately 25 years after the *pensiero* 146:

> although on the first are based the second, and on these the third, one returns back from the third to the second and to the first; and one improves the first and then the second, and again the first, and so on in innumerable circuits.[91]

The process of attaining knowledge began with something that Sarpi called "intention" (*intenzione*). This was an old nominalistic term used to define the relation between the object and the intellect. A present-day equivalent would be the term 'concept'.[92] The second step was understanding or becoming aware of the *species* (*specie particolari*). This included counting and distinguishing the number of particular *species*. The third step required the use of memory in order to identify the particular thing that had been sensed, after which, as the fourth step, one could reach the idea of a universal. The last three steps were definition (*definizione*), similitude (*similitudine*) and opinion (*ipolipse*): after having defined a thing or an object, man compared it with other known things, after which he was able to form an opinion about the object. Each of these steps required the use of reasoning and syllogism and, Sarpi repeated, "not only the first ones have been the foundation of the posterior ones, but also the posterior ones (have been that) for improving the first ones; neither the syllogism has just been the foundation of them, but they (have been that) of it".[93]

Sarpi was interested in epistemology and the problem of scientific method from his earliest writings at least until the *Arte di ben pensare*. The first *pensiero*, for example, which dates back to the year 1578, already referred to

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91 Sarpi, *Arte*, p. 580: "*quantunque sopra le prime sieno fondate le seconde, e sopra queste le terze, si ritorna indietro dalle terze alle seconde ed alle prime; e le prime si fanno meglio, e dopo meglio le seconde, ed un'altra volta le prime, e così per circuiti innumerabili*". For the dating of the *Arte di ben pensare*, see Pin 1999, pp. 609–612.

92 I take this definition of 'intention' from Luisa Cozzi's footnote to the *pensiero* no. 4, p. 13. See also Cozzi 1996, pp. xlii–xliii.

93 Sarpi, *Arte*, pp. 579, 581–582, 586: "*tutte queste con discorso e forma sillogistica . . . non le solo prime sono state fondamento delle posteriori, ma queste ancora di riformar meglio quelle; né la forma sillogistica sola è stata il fondamento di esse, ma esse di lei*".

method. In the *pensiero* Sarpi argued that there were three different ways to know: "the first is to know how to do; the second is to have an effect; the third is to conjecture the possible".[94] This seems to confirm William Bouwsma's idea of the practical aspect of Venetian culture. According to him the influence of humanism on Venetian culture remained superficial at least partly because of the Venetians' conservatism and "narrow practicality", which led patricians such as Giovanni Francesco Sagredo to take pride in administrative prowess and to assume a patronizing attitude towards "literary men".[95] Sarpi returned to the idea that to know is to know how to do (or that there is a connection between knowing and doing) in *pensieri* 237 and 270. In fact, the first *pensiero* began with an argument, which very appropriately laid the foundation for the whole collection of *pensieri*:

> We know certainly both the essence and the cause of those things, of which we have the perfect knowledge how to make them; of those, of which we know only the effect, we know the essence, but not the cause; then trying to conjecture it (the cause), we search only for that what is possible, but amongst many causes that we find possible, we cannot verify, which one would be the true.[96]

Sarpi's scientific thought was imbued with scepticism. He denied the existence of a method, which would lead to the discovery of the absolute truth, and even doubted mathematical truths. It has been suggested that Sarpi, in spite of being less competent than Galileo in applying mathematics into natural sciences, nevertheless surpassed his friend as regards reflections *on* mathematics, so much so, that he was "beyond the mathematicism" of Galileo.[97] However, expressions of doubt in relation to mathematics were not uncommon in the sixteenth-century. Alessandro Piccolomini wrote a treatise on mathematical certitude (*Commentarium de certitudine mathematicarum disciplinarum*, 1547), in which he acknowledged the certitude of mathematical

94 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 1, p. 3: "*Tre dunque sono i modi di sapere: il primo saper fare; il secondo aver sperienza; il terzo conghietturare il possibile*".

95 Bouwsma 1968, pp. 86–88.

96 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 1, p. 3: "*Sappiamo certo l'esser e la causa di quelle cose di far le quali abbiamo perfetta cognizione; di quelle che solo conosciamo per isperienza sappiam l'esser, ma non la causa; conghietturandola poi, cerchiamo solamente quella che è possibile, ma tra molte cause che troviamo possibili non possiamo certificarsi qual sia vera*".

97 Santinello 1983, pp. 937–938, 944.

truths, but questioned the usefulness of mathematics to natural sciences.[98] A much more decisive step towards epistemological scepticism was taken by the Portuguese-born physician Francisco Sanchez (1550–1623), who, playing with Socrates' adage, argued that he did not even know that he did not know anything. For Sanchez all science was "fiction" and studying stood for "solitude, deprivation of all delight, a life similar to death, living, quarrelling, conversing, pondering with the dead . . . exerting the soul, destroying the body". In short, it was an activity, which often led to "insanity".[99] Epistemological pessimism and mistrust in human reason was also present in Sarpi's writings. As we have seen, he remarked in his *pensiero* on different ways of philosophizing that the fourth way was the best "in this miserable life". Perhaps surprisingly, Galileo too admitted that perfect knowledge was a chimera: writing in 1632 that "there is not a single effect in nature, no matter how small it be, of which the most speculative minds could arrive at a complete understanding".[100] This suggests that early-modern scientists' search for truth was invariably accompanied by doubt and scepticism.

For some thinkers there was a strict hierarchical order between the topics that a scientist should study. For example the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) criticized some people for having misunderstood the proper order of philosophical study. Instead of beginning properly with divine nature, "the first in the order of knowledge and in the order of things", they placed it last in line and believed that "those things which are called objects of the senses" were the starting point for every study. When focusing on these natural objects they disregarded divine nature and when they later turned to think about God, they faced a dead end, because these studies on natural objects were merely "fictions". This, Spinoza claimed, led them to contradict themselves over and over again.[101] Giordano Bruno acknowledged the difficulty of studying the divine through natural phenomena and argued that "it is not required from a natural philosopher to infer all the causes and beginnings, but only the physical ones, and of those just the principal and proper

98 Schmitt 1983, p. 116; Ferraro 2010, p. 233.

99 Sanchez, *Quod nihil scitur*, p. 1: "*Nec unum hoc scio, me nihil scire*"; p. 24: "*Omnis scientia fictio est*"; p. 50: "*solitudo, privatio omnium deliciarum, vita mortis similis, cum mortuis degendo, pugnando, loquendo, cogitando . . . animum exercendo corpus destruere. Hinc morbi: saepe delirium*".

100 Galileo, *Dialogo*, p. 107: "*non è effetto alcuno in natura, per minimo che e' sia, all'intera cognizion del quale possano arrivare i più specolativi ingegni*".

101 Spinoza, *Ethics*, part II, proposition 10, *scholium*, p. 54.

ones".[102] He concluded that it was "most difficult" to understand divine nature by exploring physical nature, which is why it was best to leave divine matters to theologians, while natural philosophers should keep their focus on nature. Spinoza's attack against those scientists who began their research from sense perception applies to Sarpi, for whom the first step in achieving knowledge was precisely the study of objects of the senses, while divine nature was readily judged to remain uncomprehensible. In Sarpi's opinion, man could reach relatively simple knowledge based on sense perception. Failing this, he was left with a false opinion brought about by excessive speculation, which in turn issued from the lack of empirically, or naturally, formed knowledge: "when we see the connection between terms", Sarpi wrote, "we know naturally, but when we do not see it, because the intermediary causes remain hidden from us, we come up with an unnatural (explanation)".[103]

Giordano Bruno, in turn, argued that it was easier to talk about the demonstrative method than to put it into practice. Scientists who applied this method used "badly" their "instruments, principles of methods and art of the arts".[104] This argument is from the *De la causa*, which Bruno published in England in 1584. Galileo, in turn, reflected on methodology in his treatise on logical questions, written in late 1588 or in 1589. In the treatise he listed five different types of demonstration (demonstration being a reasoning process formulated as a syllogism with premises and a conclusion in the form of a proposition, which contained a subject and a predicate): 1) *ostensiva*, 2) *ad impossibile*, 3) *quia*, 4) *propter quid*, and 5) *potissima*. Galileo rejected the value of the *demonstratio ad impossibile* and focused on the last three forms of demonstration, which were actually different types of *demonstratio ostensiva*. In earlier centuries, Avicenna resorted only to demonstration *propter quid*, Thomas Aquinas to *quia* and *propter quid*, and Averroës to both along with the demonstration *potissima*, which he considered the supreme method. Like Aquinas, Galileo regarded demonstrations *quia* and *propter quid* as the best methodological forms. The first method proved something from an effect and it had several different names in Galileo's period: *resolutio*—a translation of the Greek *αναλυσις*

102 Bruno, *De la causa*, pp. 84–85: "*non si richiede dal filosofo naturale che ammeni tutte le cause e principii; ma le fisiche sole, e di queste le principali e proprie*".

103 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 256, p. 230: "*Dove noi vediamo la conession de' termini, conosciamo naturalmente, ma dove non la vediamo, perché le cause intermedie ci stiano occulte, al non naturale venghiamo*".

104 Bruno, *De la causa*, p. 84: "*è facil ordinare la dottrina demostrativa, ma il demostrare è difficile . . . malamente gli nostri metodici ed analitici metteno in esecuzione i loro organi, principii di metodi ed arte de le arti*".

(analysis)—*syllogismus a posteriori*, *demonstratio a non causa*, or *ab effectu*, *demonstratio evidentiae* and *demonstratio signi*. The second method (*propter quid*) was also known as *compositio*, which is a translation of the Greek term *συνθεσις* (synthesis). This method proved something from a cause and for example to Zabarella it was superior to the demonstration *quia*, although both of them were needed in discovering the causes of the phenomena.[105]

Both Sarpi and Galileo followed the Paduan tradition of scientific methodology which ran from Agostino Nifo to Jacopo Zabarella. According to Wallace there is little doubt that Galileo drew his methodological arguments from Zabarella (it is likely that Sarpi did the same). Nifo, Zabarella, Galileo and Sarpi were all in favour of the regressive method. Galileo argued that this method had to begin with the *demonstratio quia*, especially, since the effect had to be more known to us than the cause. Nevertheless, it was necessary to have two steps in the *regressus* and the other one had to be *demonstratio propter quid*. Thus, the reasoning proceeded from effect to cause and then regressively from cause back to effect. Galileo also required that the cause and the effect were convertible, which means that they could not be disproportional. Like Galileo, Zabarella too rejected Averroës' *demonstratio potissima*, which aimed at understanding the cause and the effect simultaneously. Instead, Zabarella placed a mental process called *mentalis consideratio* in between the demonstrations *quia* and *propter quid*. The concept of mental process is, however, somewhat ambiguous, since sometimes Zabarella referred to the "eyes of the mind" and at times argued that the very nature of the phenomena caused the understanding.[106]

Having been part of the intellectual and academic elite of Venice, it is hardly surprising if Sarpi and Galileo derived their methodology from Paduan scientific traditions. According to their point of view, the first step on the way towards knowledge was to ascertain whether the particular was a *specie* or an effect. Then, with a mental process—*mentalis consideratio* to Zabarella, reasoning "from conclusion to conclusion" to Galileo, and reasoning, syllogisms and hypotheses performed by the active intellect to Sarpi—the scientist was expected to proceed towards understanding the cause of the effect. According to Sarpi and Galileo, there was scarcely a thing that man could understand perfectly at once, which is why the scientific method had to be regressive or circulatory. These Paduan methodological principles were also familiar to Thomas Hobbes. He did not put particular stress on the principle of *regressus*, but he too emphasized the importance of understanding the laws of causation in his

105 Wallace 1984, pp. 52, 100, 116–117; Bottin 2002, pp. 40–41.

106 Wallace 1984, pp. 123–125; Bottin 2002, pp. 42, 46–47.

distinction between analytic and synthetic methods. The first proceeded from effects to causes, while the latter moved from causes to effects. Hobbes' scientific method resembled the methodological principle of "resolution and composition" developed by Zabarella and other members of the 'School of Padua'. According to them the complex thing under examination had to be resolved into its constituent parts, after which the complex whole was to be reconstructed from its components. Correspondingly, Hobbes' analysis disassembled natural phenomena into simple universal particles, which were influenced by the principle of motion. It was the motion of bodies, which then produced the natural phenomenon. Only when a phenomenon had been deconstructed into its constituents and their motion, could the scientist proceed with a synthesis, which Hobbes considered the key element in the process:

> the whole method, therefore, of demonstration is *synthetical*, consisting of that order of speech which begins from primary or most universal propositions, which are manifest of themselves, and proceeds by a perpetual composition of propositions into syllogisms, till at last the learned understands the truth of the conclusion sought after.[107]

The cardinal importance of motion to the natural philosophies of Hobbes, Galileo and Sarpi is indisputable. It is also clear that they were influenced by the methodological theories of the 'school of Padua'. It should be noted, however, that although some scholars have suggested that Hobbes inherited his idea of analysis and synthesis from Galileo, there is no evidence to suggest that there was a direct connection between the two.[108]

One implication of Sarpi's theory of knowledge is that if man's senses were deficient, so too was his knowledge. The problem lay not only in the imperfection of our five senses, but also in the fact that our senses are limited to only five. Sarpi postulated other qualities (*qualità*), which were suitable for organs that we do not have and gave magnetism as an example of such a phenomenon, which is not perceived by any of our five senses.[109] For Sarpi it followed that were the enigma of magnetism solved, the boundaries of natural philosophy and epistemology would have been expanded in a significant way. The fact that Sarpi conceived of the existence of qualities undetectable to human senses was in keeping with his materialism and atomism: whenever our senses failed to recognize a phenomenon, it was not because the phenomenon would have

107 Jesseph 1996, pp. 92–95. The quotation is on pages 94–95.

108 Jesseph 1996, p. 95.

109 Sarpi, *Arte*, p. 578.

been unnatural or incorporeal, but because our senses were deficient. There was nothing mysterious about magnetism. It was a natural phenomenon, but of such a quality that our senses could not perceive it. Sarpi's point of view was equal to that of Hobbes who wrote that "by the name of spirit we understand a body natural, but of such subtilty that it worketh not on the senses; but that filleth up the place which the image of a visible body might fill up".[110] Hobbes' materialism was not well received amongst those whose worldview relied on the idea of the existence of an immaterial spirit. While Sarpi's natural philosophy was materialistic, he nevertheless argued in his *pensieri* that intellect was incorporeal. This is a crucial difference between Sarpi and Hobbes. That matter was incapable of perception was precisely the argument that seventeenth-century English thinkers such as Seth Ward, Edward Stillingfleet and Ralph Cudworth used against Hobbes when they wanted to defend the independence of mental activity from corporeal motions.[111]

"Ex nihilo nihil"—Sarpi's Universe

According to Epicurus, the world came into being in an area, which had previously included a large amount of empty space (he specified, however, that the space had not been completely empty). Eventually some seeds from another world flew into this half-empty space, mixed and joined together in such a way that a solid and constant state of things came into existence.[112] In other words, Epicurus postulated that the world originated from seeds and that its creation was accidental. The Epicurean philosopher Lucretius summarized this point of view by concluding that "therefore, nothing can come from nothing".[113] This idea was echoed in one of Sarpi's *pensieri*, in which he reflected upon the first existing material: "nothing ever comes from nothing, but always from that which exists".[114] Sarpi did not refer to any sort of 'seeds'. Rather, he wrote about transmutation, which actually enables us to recognize matter. This is because whenever something perishes, its decay is never total, a part always remains and the part that remains consists of matter. This too was an Epicurean idea: Lucretius asserted that nothing perishes into nothingness, and nothing can

110 Hobbes, *The elements of law*, chap. XI, p. 65.

111 Mintz 1962, pp. 69–70.

112 Diogenes Laertius, bk. X, 89.

113 Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, bk. I, 205: "*Nil igitur fieri de nilo posse*".

114 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 5, p. 13: "*non facendosi mai cos'alcuna di niente, ma sempre di quello che è*".

be born without the death of something else. It should be pointed out that when Sarpi argued that a form of matter could be recognized by detecting a change or a transmutation in it, he in fact reiterated an old Aristotelian argument.[115] The Venetian politician and writer Paolo Paruta was well aware of the Epicurean conception of generation and corruption: "as the natural order of mortal things requires", he wrote, "the corruption of one thing is the generation of the other". That the French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) reiterated the same idea testifies to the popularity of Epicurean philosophy already prior to the emergence of seventeenth-century Epicureans such as Pierre Gassendi and Walter Charleton.[116]

Epicurus was a disciple of Democritus and his philosophy encompassed the latter's theory of atoms. Epicurus believed that all things were based on atoms, which he understood to be indivisible, unbreakable, eternal and always on move.[117] Sarpi was familiar with this theory and the Dominican friar Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) claimed that in 1593 both Sarpi and Galileo had been adherents of the atomistic philosophy of Democritus.[118] The theory of atoms is related to the problem of motion, arguably the topic to receive the most sustained and systematic attention in Sarpi's philosophical writings. Indeed, Sarpi concluded that "nothing is stable in the world" and "even a stone on the ground moves, because it becomes warmed up or cooled down or moved by some quality". In the same *pensiero* Sarpi claimed that "universally no corpus can be without touching another corpus", and that this touching—or moving—necessarily leads to an alteration (*alterazione*).[119] Sarpi believed that everything in the universe was in a constant state of motion, just like Epicurus' atoms, although instead of 'atom' he preferred the term 'corpus' (*corpo*). His concept of alteration—which was caused by the movement of bodies—was related to his idea of transmutation, a process, in which part of an essence perished while the rest continued to exist. In other words, Sarpi believed that everything in the universe was continuously exposed to movement and change.

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115 Coleman 2000, p. 88. The same idea was already repeated by Thomas Aquinas.

116 Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, p. 263: "*come porta la l'ordine naturale delle cose mortali, che la corruttione dell'una sia la generatione dell'altra*"; cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, bk. I, 262–264. For Michel de Montaigne, see *Essais*, vol. I, chap. XXII, p. 172: "*. . . la naissance, nourrissement et augmentation de chaque chose est l'altération et corruption d'une autre*".

117 Diogenes Laertius, bk. X, 41–44.

118 Wootton 1983, p. 42. For Galileo and the theory of atoms, see Festa 1999, pp. 101–117.

119 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 99, p. 122: "*Niuna cosa è stabile nel mondo*" . . . "*eziamdio una pietra che stia in terra si muove, perché viene o scaldata o rafreddata o mossa da alcuna qualità. Universalmente alcun corpo star non può senza altro corpo toccare*".

In a later *pensiero* Sarpi specified how fire heats the surrounding material by touching it with certain penetrating particles (*parti spiritose*) that emanate from the fire.[120] Later, Sarpi wrote about the cohesion of materials: "in metals and other similar things the particles are so close to each other, that only the most tenuous fire could enter them".[121] In the same *pensiero* Sarpi used the expression "*minimi del metallo*" to indicate the smallest particles of metal. It might be that he used concepts such as 'corpus', 'particle' or 'minimum' instead of 'atom' in order to avoid too overt an association with the notorious theory of Democritus. Nonetheless, it should be stressed, the *pensieri* were never meant to be published. This suggests that he used such concepts simply because he felt that they were adequate and specific enough terms to make the distinctions he wanted to make.

In addition to the theory of atoms, Sarpi adopted the idea of natural determinism. This was another problematic theory in the philosophical discourse of the period. In his audacious work *Colloquium heptaplomeres* Jean Bodin has one of his seven protagonists say: "there is none more serious than to think that all things which are outside man's power come from the necessary causes of nature or fortune".[122] Here Bodin criticized the point of view advocated by Sarpi in his natural philosophy. In his *pensieri* Sarpi argued, for instance, that there were many first causes, all of which were eternal and natural. From these eternal causes there issued all temporal causes, such as the heat of Mount Etna and the flooding of the river Po. "Eternal causes", instead, "do not have another cause, but each is the first of its kind", and the unbroken chain of causation continues forever, "*sino all'infinito*".[123] Every cause was also an effect, just like every number is at once bigger and smaller. Temporal causes issued from eternal causes with the help of a motional virtue (*virtù motiva*), which carried an

120 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 480, p. 358.

121 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 560, p. 419: "*ne'metalli ed altre tali cose le parti sieno tanto prossime da non potervi entrare se non fuoco tenuissimo*". See also the comment of Libero Sosio on page 420, where he quotes a similar passage from the *Discorsi* of Galileo, and points out the forty years' anteriority of Sarpi's *pensiero*.

122 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 27. The line is spoken by Toralba, who is usually considered (along with Salomon) to best represent the views of Bodin himself. For the roles of the seven discussants, see Kuntz 1975, p. xliv; Rose 1980, pp. 138, 144–145.

123 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 133, p. 150: "*Le cause eterne non hanno altra causa, ma ciascuna nel genere suo è prima*". The examples of Mount Etna and river Po are in *pensiero* no. 131, p. 149.

eternal cause to a certain place and time. In the same way *virtù motiva* could unite a number of temporal causes.[124]

Sarpi thought it possible that the effect of an eternal cause could have an essence (*essenza*), but not an existence (*esistenza*). In his opinion existence was reserved to those things whose time was limited and whose cause was free or accidental, but not to those whose time was infinite and whose cause was necessary.[125] In other words, Sarpi suggested that all things had come into being by chance, and would eventually perish, while, on the other hand, there were of necessity some eternal principles (or causes), which did not have an existence. As far as human existence was concerned, chance played a central role: it was true that Caesar was killed, but it would have been just as possible that he was not killed. Such randomness seemed typical of human affairs, whereas in nature everything happened according to laws of nature. There was a natural explanation for every phenomenon and, Sarpi asserted, the number of temporal causes dictated whether an effect would come into existence or not: the effect that "will have more of its new (i.e. temporal) causes will be more possible, and the one that will have less of them, will be less possible".[126]

It should be stressed that Sarpi discussed natural phenomena as a natural scientist and, therefore, the contents of the *pensieri* did not address supernatural concepts such as providence. In nature things happened when there were sufficient causes to create an effect, Sarpi argued. The chain of temporal causes could run infinitely, but nothing is said about the origins of eternal causes: they may or may not come from God. Sarpi was not concerned about the latter point, because he was convinced that divine matters were incomprehensible to man. The *pensieri* were an attempt to grasp the natural world and to understand the structure and mechanism of all those phenomena, which can be studied by means of natural sciences. This said, it is worth pointing out that Sarpi's conception of eternal causes comes very close to that which St. Augustine understood by 'discipline', namely, an eternal principle, which is by nature immutable. In his treatise *De immortalitate animae* Augustine illustrated

124 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 132, p. 150. Amerio 1950, pp. 22–23, observes how Sarpi held onto his Democritean point of view and rejected the Aristotelian and Scholastic cosmology, which criticized the theory of infinite chain of causes and effects, because it failed to explain the worldly contingencies and certain beginnings, which take place on earth.

125 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 134, p. 151: "*a quegli che finiscono il tempo e fanno causa la libertà, ma non a quegli che il tempo hanno per infinito, e per causa fanno la necessità*".

126 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 134, p. 151: "*quello che per il tempo B avrà più delle sue nuove cause più possibil sarà, e men possibile quello che n'avrà meno*".

his idea of eternal principle with a simple geometrical truth: a diagonal that traverses the centre of a circle is longer than any other diagonal crossing the same circle.[127] If we take it for granted that Augustine regarded 'discipline' (or any eternal principle) as a creation of God, we could equally suppose that Sarpi believed in divine provenance of eternal causes.

By making a clear distinction between essence and existence Sarpi was taking a stance in a long-standing philosophical debate within the scholastic tradition. The metaphysical problem of the nature of the essence and existence of an entity had been explained by Boëthius, who claimed that they could be one and the same in a simple entity, but not in any composite being. This argument stimulated later philosophers to discuss the problem. Thomas Aquinas refuted the so-called universal hylemorphism, according to which all corporeal as well as incorporeal beings (God excluded) were composed of matter and form, by replacing the concepts 'matter' and 'form' by those of 'essence' and '*esse*' (existence). In this way he avoided the problematic conclusion that the soul too consisted of matter. Aquinas believed that body and soul formed a single being with a shared act of existence, although the soul also had its own existence, which enabled its immortality. To Aquinas essence and existence were related to one another as potency and act, essence being that what makes an entity what it is, while existence is rather a principle of being than a being in itself, and they could not exist independently from one another. However, Aquinas made a distinction between them and claimed that no finite being was identical with its existence, but merely had an existence or participated in one.[128]

Many medieval philosophers distinguished between essence and existence, but rarely in exactly the same way. Whereas Aquinas and Giles of Rome held that there was a real composition and distinction between essence and existence in creatures, for instance, Godfrey of Fontaines admitted only a purely abstract distinction of reason. Then there were various intermediary positions adopted by figures such as Henry of Ghent, who introduced the idea of "intentional distinction", according to which there was only a distinction of reason between a definition and the thing that was being defined, but, instead, a real distinction between substance and accident. Also for Duns Scotus the distinction was somewhere between the real and the purely mental distinction of reason. What is more interesting here is that Ockham, one of Sarpi's favourite philosophers, denied the real distinction between essence and existence. In

127 Augustine, *Sull'anima*, p. 64: "*semper est disciplina. Nam quod est atque inmutabile est, semper sit necesse est . . . fieri non posse, ut ducta per medium circulum linea non sit omnium, quae non per medium ducuntur, maxima*".

128 Wippel 1982, pp. 392–396; Coleman 2000, p. 90.

fact, he argued that they signified one and the same thing.[129] Sarpi diverged from Ockham on this point, since he clearly referred to essence and existence as separate things. His brief discourse on essence and existence in *pensieri* nos 132–134 was exclusively related to the nature of natural causation, but I consider it likely that according to Sarpi man had an existence. As we have just seen, in Sarpi's philosophy existence implied mortality, because, in his view, only such things whose time was limited had an existence. Therefore, the assumption that man has an existence is compatible with Sarpi's religious thought and, more specifically, with his belief in the natural mortality of the soul.

In Sarpi's opinion a phenomenon would be unnatural, if it was independent from the infinite chain of causation, "but because from every (cause) follows naturally all that follows, therefore everything is natural".[130] It has been suggested that Sarpi's idea of nature as some kind of a ubiquitous and sufficient unity had its roots in Paduan Aristotelianism and in the philosophy of Pietro Pomponazzi.[131] It is true that the naturalism which Sarpi elaborated in his *pensieri* was exclusive in the sense that it did not necessitate divine providence, but this only means that providence is absent in the *pensieri*. It is not necessarily lacking from Sarpi's thought as a whole. In order to better understand what Sarpi thought of the relations between God and nature, it is useful to turn to his correspondent Jacques Leschassier who wrote about "human … societies whose mother is nature, which, as Aristotle says, is the cause of the order that is in everything". Leschassier continued that "in order to recognize this law (of nature), one simply has to observe the will of God, which is what the Stoics … understand with the word 'nature'".[132] Here Leschassier identified divine will with nature. I believe that Sarpi too identified nature with the divine, but there was no need for him to set individual *pensieri* in some sort of an explicit divine narrative or to explain them in the light of providence. This is simply because the *pensieri* were brief impromptu notes on various scientific matters, not a systematic study about nature or the universe. The latter would have required a very different approach, most likely one with frequent references to God.

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129 Wippel 1982, pp. 394, 396, 399, 401–404, 407.

130 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 138, p. 153: "*ma poiché da ciascuna sequì naturalmente quel tutto che sequì, perciò natural si è il tutto*".

131 Amerio 1950, p. 26: "*fonte Patavina e Pomponazziana*".

132 Leschassier, *Du droit de nature*, pp. 41–42: "*societez … humaines don't la nature est mere, elle qui comme dit Aristote, est cause de l'ordre qui est en toutes choses … pour la cognoissance de ce droit, il faut se rendre seulement observateur de la volonté de Dieu, que les Stoiciens … entendent sous le nom de nature*".

Motion

A considerable part of Sarpi's philosophical writings was dedicated to the question of motion. He detected motion everywhere: in atoms, in celestial bodies, in the interaction between cause and effect, and even in the human psyche. In his first philosophical text Sarpi adopted a broadly Aristotelian teleology and explained motion from the point of view of the end of the object or agent that is in motion. He argued that it is the end that makes a thing move: "amongst all causes and beginnings the end holds the principal place, since that is what moves the agent".[133] In his *pensieri* Sarpi moved further from the Aristotelian position, partly independently, partly with the help of Benedetti and Galileo. Libero Sosio has in fact distinguished three different periods in Sarpi's *pensieri* on motion: 1) 1578–1584, a period, when Sarpi reflected upon the philosophical aspects of the phenomenon; 2) 1585–1592, the Benedettian period; 3) 1593–1595, the Galileian period.[134] In light of these time frames Sarpi was first puzzled by the nature of motion and especially by the question of *impetus*. How could something that was thrown in the air continue its motion after the act of throwing had already stopped? Why did a thing that had been thrown in the air persist in motion? Aristotle identified two kinds of motion: natural and violent. Natural motion was intrinsic, while violent motion resulted from an external source, as in the case of throwing something in the air. Aristotle explained the motion of projectiles by claiming that it was the air with its particular nature of being heavy and light at the same time, which sustained the movement. This theory was refuted in fourteenth-century Paris by philosophers such as Jean Buridan, Nicole Oresme, Albert of Saxony and Marsilius of Inghen. They turned Aristotle's theory upside down and argued that it was not the means (*medium* or *mezzo*), in this case the air, that sustained the motion, but, on the contrary, the means was an obstacle against which the projectile had to fight. According to these thinkers the projectile was in a continuous contact with the cause of its flight by the means of an *impetus*, a force which was directly transferred from the source of the projection to the projectile. In this transference the power that caused the projection impressed a *virtus motiva* in the object that was thrown in the air, as Albert of Saxony put it.[135] The *virtus motiva* which in Sarpi's theory of the universe connected eternal and temporal causes was undoubtedly related to the *virtus motiva* described by

133 Sarpi, *De rerum initiis et perfectionibus*, in Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 755: "*Finis inter causas omnes, atque principia Principem semper obtinet locum, ipse enim est ille, a quo agens excitatur*".

134 Sosio 1971, p. 320.

135 Sosio 1996a, pp. cviii–cx, and his note to *pensiero* no. 44; Wallace 1988, pp. 206–207.

Albert of Saxony in that both were forces which sustained or in some other way contributed to motion and transmutation, regardless the nature and origin of the cause behind the action.

That Sarpi adopted the theory of *impetus* at an early stage is evident from a *pensiero*, which dates from his pre-Benedettian period. Here Sarpi claimed that it was easier to throw a relatively heavy than a light object over a long distance. "After having departed from the mover", Sarpi wrote, the heavy object "has received a virtue to divide the means, which is something that lighter things are not capable of". He then concluded that the amount of "impressed virtue" depended on the "quantity or weight" of the object. This observation had already been made by Albert of Saxony and Jean Buridan, who specified that a greater amount of *impetus* was consumed less quickly than a smaller amount, which was transferred into a lighter projectile.[136]

Benedetti too clung to the theory of *impetus*. His most important contribution to the studies on dynamics was the claim that "if two corpora were of the same form and species, equal or unequal, they would move the same distance in the same means in the same time."[137] He made this observation already in his *De resolutione* (1553), which was neither as well disseminated, nor as influential as his *Diversarum speculationum*, published more than thirty years later. It is also likely that Sarpi read only the latter, since there are no traces of Benedetti in *pensieri* prior to 1585. Benedetti in turn read Archimedes who had a great influence on those sixteenth-century scientists who were interested in mechanics. It is worth pointing out that Benedetti's teacher Niccolò Tartaglia edited a Latin version of Archimedes' *Liber de insidentibus aquae* in 1543. Galileo too admired Archimedes and went as far as calling him "superhuman", and he also claimed that he never mentioned Archimedes' name "without a feeling of awe". Sarpi also read Archimedes and made one direct reference to him in his *pensieri*. There are traces of Archimedes in Sarpi's scientific texts already before his Benedettian period, but it was only after Sarpi had read Benedetti that he began to focus more profoundly on 'Archimedesian' questions.

136 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 44, p. 54: "*la cosa mossa, quand'è partita dal motore, abbia ricevuto virtù di divider il mezzo, della quale non sono capaci le cose leggierissime. Dunque la virtù imprimesi maggior o minore secondo la maggior quantità e peso*". Buridan's remark is in Sosio's note to this *pensiero*. For Albert of Saxony, see Sosio 1971, p. 327.

137 I quote from Sosio 1971, p. 331 note 26: "*Si fuerint duo corpora eiusdem formae, eiusdem speciei, aequalia invicem, vel inaequalia, per aequale spacium in eodem medio in aequali tempore ferentur*". For Benedetti and *impetus*, see page 333.

One of these questions was the relation between the weight of a moving object and the weight of the substance, in which the object moved.[138] Sarpi tackled this question in a *pensiero* from the Benedettian period and observed that an object, which was lighter than water ascended from the bottom towards the surface. This movement did not take place because the object would rise naturally on power innate to it, but because it became pushed by the water. In the next *pensiero* Sarpi noted that this movement, which was violent by nature, happened at an increasing speed. Here Sarpi was at odds with Aristotle who claimed that violent motion slowed down gradually.[139] In the *pensieri* 315–323 Sarpi reflected in a more detailed manner on the question of weight and density, and, drawing on Archimedes, argued that "a weight weighs as much less in a dense substance than in a thin one, as an amount of the dense substance, equal to the weight in magnitude, weighs in the rare (substance)".[140] In these *pensieri* Sarpi already pondered the foundations of motion on quantitative grounds. There are several *pensieri*—starting with the no. 158, written in 1585—where Sarpi referred to the "*grave* (or *peso*) *in ispecie*", the weight of the object. To compare the heaviness of the object with the weight of the substance that surrounded the object was to study the question of weight from a relativistic point of view. There is, in fact, a pre-Benedettian *pensiero* in which Sarpi rejected the Aristotelian idea of absolute gravity and lightness and argued instead that "nothing is big or small without comparison", which is to say that the same thing can be "heavy to one and light to another". This is important, because Aristotelian cosmology was founded on the idea of the existence of absolute gravity and lightness, as Libero Sosio has pointed out.[141]

The relativistic element in Sarpi's natural philosophy points towards the instability of the universe; his concept of physics and cosmology seems to lack all steady points of support. This is crucial for our understanding of how Sarpi's natural philosophy influenced his political thought. Not only did he claim that all corporeal things in the universe were in a constant state of motion,

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138 Sosio 1971, pp. 331, 334–335; Wallace 1984, p. 240; Sosio 1996a, p. cviii; Sosio's notes to *Pensieri* nos. 13, 158, 209 and 315.

139 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, nos. 208–209, pp. 188–189; Sosio's note to the *pensiero* no. 209.

140 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 315, p. 259: "*Un grave pesa tanto meno in un mezzo denso che in un raro quanto una quantità del mezzo denso uguale al grave in magnitudine pesa nel raro. Archimede*".

141 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 45, pp. 56–57: "*niuna cosa è grande o piccola se non paragonata . . . così essendo ad una grave, ad un'altra leggiera la stessa cosa*"; Sosio's notes to *pensieri* nos. 45 and 209.

he also maintained that abstract ideas such as gravity were relative and therefore subject to change and alteration. I believe it was this scientific concept of motion and instability that led Sarpi to embrace the theory of absolutism and unconditional obedience. His epistemological views play a pivotal role here: God alone saw through the confusion of ceaseless motion and change, while man perceived only the most obvious alteration that occurred in his immediate environment. Because of the imperfection of his sense perception and intellect, it was best for man to submit himself to the will of a sovereign ruler who—as a minister of God—partook in divine knowledge and power. In this sense Sarpi's absolutism had its roots deep in his epistemological scepticism, theory of motion and Augustinian concept of man as a fallen, imperfect creature.

Experiments on falling bodies were an important aspect of sixteenth-century scientific revolution. These experiments were made in the hope of discovering the true nature of motion, one of the key problems that natural scientists of the period dealt with. Both Benedetti and Galileo maintained that the velocity of falling bodies, which was determined by the excess of the weight of the body in respect to the weight of the substance through which it fell, had to be proportional to that excess. Sarpi rejected the idea of proportionality in a *pensiero* of Benedettian period: "the times are not proportional to the weights of the objects when two bodies are moving in the same substance". However, he seems to have agreed with Benedetti and Galileo in later *pensieri*, dating from the time when Galileo had just arrived to Padua.[142] The Spanish Dominican philosopher Domingo de Soto proposed already in the mid-sixteenth century that the velocity of falling bodies accelerated uniformly and, reversely, decelerated uniformly when thrown upward. In 1575 Girolamo Borro, Galileo's teacher in Pisa, related the experiments he had made by repeatedly projecting pieces of wood and lead from a high window. According to Borro the wood hit the ground before the lead. The following year Giuseppe Moletti, a Paduan mathematician, conducted the same experiment with the result that both the wooden and the lead ball reached the ground exactly at the same moment. It was the example of Borro that inspired Galileo to perform his famous experiments in Pisa and, eventually, to prove the uniform acceleration in free fall.[143]

Sarpi too reflected upon the acceleration of falling bodies. In a *pensiero* written in 1592, the very year in which Galileo arrived in Padua, Sarpi argued

142 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 325, p. 264: "*I tempi non sono proporzionali ai pesi in ispecie quando due corpi si muovono per il medesimo mezzo*"; Sosio's note to the *pensiero*; Sosio 1971, p. 338.

143 Wallace 1988, pp. 221–223.

that a weight travelling upwards has only *impetus*, the force that has been impressed into it by the motor, but when it starts to descend, the *impetus* begins to decrease, and "the natural motion increases the more the external force diminishes, and therefore the motion adds to the weight".[144] Here the acceleration was explained by the decrease of violent motion, the *impetus*, which first caused the object to fly upwards, and then, at the beginning of the downfall, it continued to resist so that the velocity of the falling body was at first very slow. It is significant that Sarpi did not use the term *impetus* here and that he argued against the traditional theory of *impetus*, since his theory did not posit impressed force during the fall of the object. In the previous *pensiero* Sarpi grappled with the example of a bullet, which, when shot upwards, could pierce a table, but when falling down hardly left a mark on it. The *impetus* of a projectile should have been proportional to its weight. On the other hand, also natural motion in free fall should have been proportional to the weight of the falling body. Why, then, did the bullet have less force when falling than when going upwards? If the body were to fall infinitely, it would not mean, that its speed would respectively increase infinitely, since the original *impetus* would eventually die out, after which the body would continue its motion at the speed proportional to its weight, which should be the same speed that the body would have had when thrown or shot upwards. The same idea appeared in Galileo's *De motu* and it is possible that the two had discussed the problem in Venice, where Galileo spent two weeks in September 1592 before starting his lectures at Padua on 7 December of the same year. The problem proved difficult to solve and still on 9 October 1604 Sarpi wrote to Galileo and asked his opinion about an arrow, which seems to have lost its power when falling down. In his reply of 16 October Galileo adhered to the idea that the power should be the same at the end of the fall as it is in the moment of launch upwards: "what comes to the example of the arrow, I believe that it acquires in the fall a force similar to that with which it was launched".[145]

In the same letter to Sarpi, now famous amongst the historians of science, Galileo formulated for the first time his law of the acceleration of falling bodies, one of the key principles of modern physics. He wrote that whereas previously he had been unable to find a "totally undoubtable principle", which could have been made an axiom, now he had "a proposition, which is very

144 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 536, p. 393: "*il moto naturale più cresce più che manca la forza esterna, e di qui viene che* motus addit ponderi".

145 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, Sosio's notes to the *pensieri* nos. 535–536; the quotation is in the note 535 on page 393: "*Quanto all' esperienza della freccia, credo che nel cadere acquisterà pari forza a quella con che fu spinta*"; Sosio 1971, p. 342; Sosio 1996a, pp. cxliv–cxlvi.

natural and evident". This proposition showed "the distances passed in natural motion to be in double proportion to the time", from which one can derive the principle that "the velocity of a natural mobile accelerates in proportion to the distance to the beginning of its motion".[146]

Sarpi understood the significance of Galileo's law of falling bodies and claimed that there were three great genii in his time: "Vieta in algebra, Gilbert in speculations on magnetism, Galileo in the knowledge of motion". As late as in 1634 Micanzio wrote to Galileo that according to Sarpi "nature produces genii" who are apt for certain thoughts or ideas, which would not be reached without these people, and, Micanzio continued, "he gave You as an example as far as (the idea of) motion is concerned, and he used to say to everybody that You had never had a peer in that matter, and he did not believe that You would ever have".[147] Sarpi was also eager to push Galileo further in his research, as we can judge from a letter from Giovanni Francesco Sagredo to Galileo: "*Padre Maestro* has asked me to persuade You to write something about motion".[148] Sagredo's letter dates from 1619 and thus shows that Sarpi was still interest in the problem of motion several decades after his first *pensieri* on the phenomenon.

Sarpi's thoughts on natural and violent motion and his adoption of the theory of *impetus* imply deviation from Aristotelian physics. While Aristotle rejected the idea that violent and natural motion could exist simultaneously in the same body (claiming instead that one always dominates the other), Sarpi and Galileo argued that both motions coexisted at once in a moving body. According to Sosio this was their "great discovery".[149] In fact, Sarpi blurred the distinction between natural and violent motion and claimed that "a stone would not move upwards if it would not be naturally inclined to be moved". Furthermore, he maintained that the distinction between the two types of

146 I quote from Cozzi 1979, p. 164: "*mi mancava principio totalmente indubitabile da poter porlo per assioma, mi son ridotto ad una propositione la quale ha molto del naturale et dell'evidente . . . cioè gli spazzii passati dal moto naturale esser in proporzione doppia dei tempi . . . Et il principio è questo: che il mobile naturale vadia crescendo di velocità con quella proportione che si discosta dal principio del suo moto*".

147 Sosio 1996a, pp. cxlvii–cxlviii: "*soleva dire esso buon Padre, che la natura produce in certe età ingegni atti a certe contemplationi, che se da loro non vengono toccate, non vi resta più speranza di conseguirle; e portava l'essempio di V.S. nel moto, e diceva a tutti che ella in questo non haveva mai havuto pari, né credeva fosse per haverlo*". Micanzio repeated this in his letters of 11 November 1634 and 25 October 1636 to Galileo.

148 Sosio 1996a, p. cxlviii note 131: "*Il Padre Maestro . . . m'ha pregato ad eccitarla a scrivere alcuna cosa sopra il moto*". The letter was written on 8 March 1619.

149 Sosio 2006, p. 210: "*la grande scoperta di Sarpi e Galileo è che i moti cosidetti violento e naturale coesistono e si compongono in ogni momento*".

motion could only be made in the cause of the movement, which could be internal (natural) or external (violent). Sarpi concluded that circular motion could be violent in one thing, as in a spinning top, or natural, as in the stars. According to Libero Sosio here Sarpi followed Jean Buridan (1300–1358)—the French priest and scientist—not only as regards the idea of *impetus*, but also in arguing that celestial bodies were not moved by intellects, but by some kind of a *virtue* or *impetus*.[150]

There is a *pensiero* in which Sarpi argued that "no motion is irregular, but a congeries of many regulars appears as one irregular to him who does not know them all". Many things had several causes and they would have seemed unnatural, if one or more causes were unknown and "this, as we can see, has happened in judging the motion of the planets". On the other hand, Sarpi noted that he who knew all the causes also understood the naturalness of the phenomenon, since in the end "every motion is regular". Here Sarpi made one of the few references to God in the *Pensieri*, asserting that he alone knew all the causes.[151] It is worth mentioning that already in his first *pensiero* Sarpi remarked how difficult it was to ascertain the true cause amongst many possible causes, and this was particularly true in matters related to cosmology: "that is what one sees happening in the descriptions of celestial theories".[152]

In short, Sarpi maintained that every motion was regular, either natural or violent as regarded its beginning, and either rectilinear or circular as far as its track was concerned. The distinction between rectilinear and circular course of the mobile is of particular importance. In his *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* Galileo argued that "if the integral bodies of the world have to be mobile by their nature, it is impossible that their motion would be rectilinear or other than circular". Rectilinear motion served only to provide matter, but since the universe had already been made and since there was no need for matter, the integral bodies were either immobile, or, if mobile, their motion had to be circular. In the beginning nature put a mobile object (which had been in rest so far) into rectilinear motion, during which its velocity accelerated. The acceleration took place only when the object started to move towards its natural

150 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 100, pp. 123–124: "*Il violento e il naturale non sono due nature diverse, ma due modi di essere d'una stessa natura . . . né il sasso muoverebbesi all'insù quando naturalmente ad esser mosso atto non fosse*". Sosio 1986, p. 164.

151 *Pensieri*, no. 136, p. 152: "*niun moto è irregolare, ma la congerie di molti regolari, a chi non gli sa tutti, un irregolare apparisce: vediamo esser già stato così nel giudicar il moto de' pianeti . . . dunque regolare è ogni moto, e predire si può da chi le sue cause tutte sappia. Questi peraltro è solo Iddio*".

152 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 1, p. 3: "*il che si vede avvenir nelle descrizioni delle teorie celesti*".

place (*luogo desiderato*), to where it travelled via shortest possible route, which in turn entailed rectilinear motion. Galileo asserted, following Plato, that in the case of Jupiter for example God first created a body, set it in a "rectilinear and accelerating motion", and then, when the body reached a certain velocity, God "converted its rectilinear motion into a circular one", of which the velocity would remain perpetually uniform.[153]

"Everything that moves circularly", Sarpi wrote in early 1590s, "when disconnected to its source of power, moves contingently" He then added that "circular motion has the capacity to discontinue, but if the power to remain united is greater, it does not dissipate".[154] In the following *pensiero* Sarpi used this principle in order to refute the Ptolemaic claim, according to which the rotation of earth would necessarily lead into chaos and destruction. Ptolemy's claim had already been brought up and rejected by Nicolaus Copernicus. Sarpi argued that "heavy objects on the earth would not dissipate", should the earth rotate around its axis, firstly, because the earth is so great that "the tangent and the circumference are the same". This argument resembles the theory of *coincidentia oppositorum* of Nicholas of Cusa, adopted later by Giordano Bruno. According to this theory opposites coincide ultimately and thus for example a circle, when it is infinitely large, coincides with a straight line. The second argument, which Sarpi used in order to reject the Ptolemaic vision of people, animals and buildings being hurled into the space, was that the "virtue of remaining united" was strong enough to resist the disaster envisaged by Ptolemy. Thirdly, Sarpi argued, heavy bodies on earth were not on its surface, but in the middle, where they were better protected against the centrifugal force of the rotatory motion. What Sarpi meant by this was that above the surface of the earth there was still a sphere of air and possibly another one of fire.[155]

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153 Galileo, *Dialogo*, pp. 19–21: "*se i corpi integrali del mondo devono esser di lor natura mobili, è impossibile che i mobili loro siano retti, o altri che circolari . . . possiamo dunque dire, il moto retto servire a condur le materie per fabbricar l'opera, ma fabbricata ch'ell'è, o restare immobile, o, se mobile, muoversi solo circolarmente . . . Iddio creato il corpo, verbigrazia, di Giove, al quale abbia determinato di voler conferire una tal velocità, la quale egli poi debba conservare perpetuamente uniforme: potremo con Platone dire che gli desse di muoversi da principio di moto retto ed accelerato, e che poi, giunto a quel talgrado di velocità, convertisse il suo moto retto in circolare, del quale poi la velocità naturalmente convien esser uniforme*".

154 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 539, p. 400: "*Ogni cosa che sia mossa circolarmente, se si discontinua da dov'è la forza, muovesi per la contingente, ed esso moto circolare ha virtù di discontinuare, ma se la forza dello star unito è maggiore non dissipa*".

155 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 540, p. 401: "*Li gravi in Terra non si dissiparebbono, sì perché in tanta grandezza della Terra la contingente e la circolare son la stessa, come perché la virtù di star unito è maggiore a motivo che un grave all'in giù verrebbe più di quindici miglia al minuto,*

Galileo joined Sarpi and Copernicus in his *Dialogo*. The discussion about the Ptolemaic menace between Salviati, Sagredo and Simplicio is several pages long and much more elaborate than Sarpi's concise note. Galileo let Salviati explain in detail to Simplicio how a stone could not be flung from earth because its motion away from the surface was much smaller than its natural inclination to fall towards the centre of the earth. Towards the end of his book and in keeping with Sarpi Galileo identified infinite circle with a straight line. This idea must have been commonplace and Galileo may have gleaned it from Cusa or Bruno just as well as from Sarpi. However, according to Sosio there are such similarities in Sarpi and Galileo, not only in the question of the rotation of earth, but in many others as well, which are too precise to be accidental.[156]

Sarpi's cosmology was Copernican and heliocentric. He became Copernican gradually and only after a meticulous study of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium*.[157] A further evidence for the interest in and the support for Copernican theory amongst Sarpi's friends is provided by Micanzio who wrote sarcastically that "if the Jesuits turn the immobility of the earth into an article of faith, they will make sure that all the professors of astronomy will become heretics".[158] Furthermore, Micanzio wrote to William Cavendish that Gilbert's *De magnete* and Copernicus' *De revolutionibus* were "two excellent pieces never to be reprinted, a thing which the singularnes of the worke never merited".[159] As is often the case, while Sarpi remained ambiguous and indirect, his more outspoken friend helps us to build a more comprehensive reconstruction of his thought.

The central importance of motion in Sarpi's philosophy becomes more accentuated if we compare the *pensieri* for example with Contarini's *De rerum perfectione*. Whereas Sarpi returned over and over again to struggle with the

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finalmente perché i gravi nostri nell' estremo non sono ma nel mezzo della circolazione"; Sosio 1996a, pp. cxlviii–cl. For Cusa and Bruno, Bönker-Vallon 1999, p. 68; Ingegno 1988, p. 254; Lohr 1988, pp. 551–552.

156 Galileo, *Dialogo*, the discussion starts on page 197; p. 388: "*finalmente la circonferenza del cerchio infinito e una linea retta sono l'istessa cosa*"; Sosio 1996a, p. cl.

157 Sarpi mentions Copernicus in the *pensieri* nos. 202, 384, 639, 640, 643 and 655. He did not explicitly adhere to Copernicus' theory, but, as pointed out by Libero Sosio, the way in which Sarpi referred to Copernicus proves his acceptance of the latter's theory. See, Sosio 1986, *passim* and especially pp. 183–185; and Sosio 1996a, pp. cxxi–cxxii, cxx, cxxiii, cxxvi, cxxxi, cxxxiii, cxxxvii.

158 Galileo, *Opere*, vol. XVI, Micanzio's letter to Galileo on 21 October 1634, p. 144: "*se i gesuiti faranno articolo di fede l'immobilità della terra, s'assicurino pure che tutti li professori di astronomia hanno d'essere heretici*".

159 Micanzio, *Lettere*, letter of 28 September 1618, p. 80.

problem, Contarini contented himself with a brief survey of less than two pages in a book of almost 400 pages. He justified this brevity by saying that Aristotle had already "explained subtly the whole thing". This remark betrays a sharp difference in Sarpi and Contarini: the first had serious scientific ambitions, while the latter studied nature as a patrician for whom a cursory knowledge of basic scientific problems was sufficient. This also explains why Contarini's concept of motion was entirely Aristotelian: "for motion is action", he wrote, "that is impressed by an efficient motor on that what moves. This action, unless continued, is deleted and it evanesces".[160]

Motion, alteration and transmutation were the fundamental constituents of Sarpi's universe. In his view the penetrating particles of fire were forced to move by motional virtue, a universal principle, which united eternal and temporal causes. As we have seen, Sarpi detected movement of atoms everywhere, even in stones. In this scheme everything happened according to the laws of nature, which were understood perfectly only by God. Man's knowledge remained insufficient, because of the deficiency of our senses. This view led Sarpi to emphasize the omnipotence of God and his 'ministers', the secular rulers, and to submit himself to the service of these higher forces.

160 Contarini, *De perfectione rerum*, pp. 216–217: "*ab Aristotele … subtiliter explicata tota res est … Est enim motus actio, quae a movente profecta imprimitur in eo, quod movetur. Quae actio, nisi continetur, deletur et evanescit*".

CHAPTER 4

Postlapsarian Man

The Nature of Man

Medieval and Renaissance interpretations of the nature and role of man were profoundly shaped by what the Book of Genesis tells about Adam and Eve's defiance of God and their subsequent expulsion form the garden of Eden. The notion of sinful and wretched postlapsarian man, tainted by original sin and powerless with regard to his own salvation, was based on Augustine's interpretation of Adam's rebellion, the fall, and the necessity of divine grace. This pessimistic interpretation of human nature became popular by the late fifteenth century and appeared in the writings of reformers and erudites such as Luther, Calvin, Sarpi, Pierre Charron (1541–1603), Abbé of Saint-Cyran (1581–1643), Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) and Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). Indeed, it has been argued that this sort of 'Augustinian moment' endured in European centres of learning for over three centuries, until the time of the French Revolution.[1] Of the many sixteenth-century writers who were influenced by the Augustinian concept of man it was in particular the French thinker Pierre Charron whose idea of the nature of man came close to that of Sarpi. Although the philosophies of Charron and Sarpi were deeply naturalistic, they also adhered to the Augustinian concept of man's depravity and at least Sarpi explicitly adopted Augustine's theory of grace.[2] At the same time, Sarpi's understanding of the nature of man was to a large extent Epicurean, as we will see.

Similarities between Charron and Sarpi are evident in their reflections upon the differences between man and animals. Sarpi concluded that while an animal knows only natural and useful things, man was often led astray by his superfluous knowledge. Sarpi believed that excessive knowledge was harmful, observing in 1609 that "one does not only learn truths, but also, and in a greater number, falsehoods, and one falsehood damages more than a hundred truths benefit".[3] This is one of many passages, in which Sarpi (paradoxically, by this point a famous erudite) expressed his distrust in human reason. In his view

1 For Charron and Saint-Cyran, see Popkin 1979, pp. 113–115; Kogel 1972, p. 67; For Jansen and his followers, see Doyle 2000, p. 6 and *passim*.

2 According to Maia Neto 1995, p. 26, Charron's point of view was naturalistic, not Augustinian.

3 Sarpi, *Arte*, p. 593: "*non solo s'imparano verità, ma falsità in maggior numero e più nuoce una falsità, che non giovano cento verità*".

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man struggled with the flow of information both because of the weakness of his senses (which he considered inferior to those of many animals) and because of his reasoning capacity (which he considered superior to that of animals, but still hopelessly weak in front of many problems). Sarpi believed that while animals relied on quick and instinctive reactions, man often became paralyzed by the slow and unnecessarily convolute process of reasoning. Much later, but in a similar vein, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) argued that a reflective state of mind was unnatural and a "meditating man" little more than a "depraved animal".[4] Sarpi believed that man was debilitated not only by his own reason, but also by defects in his physical constitution, which was weaker than that of animals. "Not the body that is kept well with medicines", he wrote, "but the one that does not need them, is the better one". He then concluded that "man more than any of the animals needs medicines", which only proved that "he especially is imperfect".[5] In my view, Sarpi's belief in man's physical and moral imperfection was conducive to the emergence of absolutistic principles in his political thought. It was, in fact, quite typical of those sixteenth-century political thinkers who—like Sarpi—insisted on the key importance of obedience to base their political theory on an Augustinian reading of the nature of man. These thinkers included Justus Lipsius and Pierre Charron, but also, to a certain extent, religious figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Renaissance writers often resorted to the method of comparing men with animals in their attempts to define the nature of man. They argued that man's physical weakness, his lack of fur, scales, horns and so on, was compensated for by the invincible abilities of reason. God himself had taken the form of man and this was considered an undisputable proof of man's superiority over animals. It was also argued that God had created man in his image and that the body of man was perfect and suitable to be the measure of all things. The fifteenth-century philosopher and scientist Nicholas of Cusa even claimed that man's capability to create an autonomous mental world was similar to God's ability to create the real world. While the mortal body of man connected him to the temporal world of animals, his immortal soul united him with divine eternity. Man was at once mortal and immortal, a fact that, according to the Neoplatonistic tradition, rendered him the *vinculum mundi*, the link between material and cognitive worlds. Drawing on Aristotle's theory of the soul's three dimensions, the

4 Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. I, p. 87: "*j'ose presque assurer que l'état de réflection est un état contre nature, et que l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé*".

5 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 404, p. 307: "*Non è migliore il corpo, che sano conservasi colle medicine, ma quello che di loro bisogno non ha: onde perché l'uomo più di tutti animali abbisogna di medicine, sopra tutti egli è imperfetto*".

vegetative, the sensitive and the rational, Renaissance philosophers typically regarded sense perception as the highest faculty in animals, while that of man was cognition. Needless to say, cognition was deemed superior to sense perception. Replying to those who were stunned by man's weakness in comparison to animals, the Florentine humanist Benedetto Varchi (1502–1565) made the arch inquiring: "do we rather choose swimming than walking . . . are we more fond of running than discussing".[6] Paolo Paruta in turn claimed that there was such "nobility" in man that it rendered him "similar to angels" and elevated him "far above the nature of animals".[7] It is not surprising that Varchi and Paruta numbered amongst those writers who embraced republicanism.[8] Their interpretation of the nature of man was positive and their political stance favoured notions such as civic freedom, while Sarpi, bound by his Augustinian concept of man, preferred control, submission and obedience.

According to Pierre Charron the comparison between man and "other creatures" was an "excellent meanes to know him", although he remarked that "man is neither altogether above, nor beneath the rest".[9] He concluded that man was, however, above animals as far as his "great faculties of the soule" were concerned, but allowed that animals surpassed him in physical health and strength. In Charron's opinion it would have been incorrect to say that animals had no "reasonable faculties, discourse, reasoning, discipline, judgment, prudence" at all. He claimed that their reasoning capacities were simply weaker than those of man, although he specified that the difference between one man and another man was greater than that between a man and an animal. Charron disagreed with those who disparaged these faculties in animals and "maliciously" judged them to be little more than "naturall, servile, and forced inclination", because this amounted to saying that animals acted "by a naturall necessitie" like a stone that is falling downwards. He concluded that it is in fact "more noble, honourable, and resembleth more the Divinitie to work by nature than by art and apprentiship". Furthermore, it was better to be led by God, "regularly to act by a naturall and inevitable condition, than regularly by a rash and casuall liberties".[10] This remark suggests that—like Sarpi—Charron adopted natural determinism. Since determinism was an idea fundamentally incompatible with the republican quest for civic freedom, it is not a surprise

6 Kraye 1988, pp. 308–311, the quotation is on page 308, note 39: "*Eleggeremo più volentieri il nuotare che l'andare? . . . ci piacerà più il correre che il discorrere?*".

7 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 70: "*la nobiltà di lui che lo rende agli angeli simigliante, e molto l'innalza sopra la natura de'bruti*".

8 For Varchi, see Bouwsma 1968, p. 160; for Paruta, see Comparato 2002, pp. 170–172.

9 Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. I, chap. xxxiv, pp. 101–102.

10 Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. I, chap. xxxiv, pp. 104–105, 107–108.

that some scholars have seen Charron as a "proto-absolutist" and a precursor to Hobbes.[11]

Charron argued that man's great intellectual capacities were not a blessing, but, instead, "the principall source of all those evils that oppresse him". These evils included "vices, passions, maladies, irresolution, trouble, despaire", all of which were absent to animals who lacked "this great advantage" of the great "spirituall faculties". Charron rejected the idea that man commanded animals and remarked that "men do more feare beasts, than beasts them". He also noted that some men were slaves voluntarily, for money or for the "lightness of heart", a phenomenon alien to animals who "never serve one another".[12] Having questioned the blessing of man's intellect, his position as the commander of nature, and his freedom in comparison with animals, Charron turned to the "greatest advance pretended by man", virtue. Here too he adopted a scathing attitude, arguing that men were not that virtuous after all, while animals set a great example in moral excellence. Charron deplored the fact that no creature in the world was more "unjust, unthankfull, traiterous, perfidious, lying and deceitful than man", while animals were free from "unnaturall, superfluous and artificiall passions" and therefore "much more moderate than wee". Virtue, Charron stressed, consisted of "moderation of our appetites" and appeared more characteristic of animals than of man. He concluded that "untruely and vainly doth man glorifie himselfe above beasts", who, as regards the life "according to nature . . . farre exceede men", for they live "more freely, securely, moderately, contentedly".[13]

In a similar vein, both Sarpi and Michel de Montaigne questioned man's uniqueness in comparison with animals. Yet, whereas Montaigne's approach was to argue that animals were actually capable of playing, communicating and designing their own nests, in other words, capable of same functions as man, Sarpi emphasized the animal characteristics of man. According to Sarpi animals could react to things only in one certain way, which he referred to as "natural instinct". As Vittorio Frajese has pointed out, in Sarpi's view this sort of 'natural instinct' also applied to man.[14] In fact, Sarpi seems to have reduced both human and animal conduct to mere mechanics:

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11 Clark 1994, p. 45; Grendler 1963, pp. 212–224.

12 Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. I, chap. xxxiv, pp. 109–110.

13 Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. I, chap. xxxiv, pp. 110–112.

14 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. 12, pp. 156–159; Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 139, p. 153: "*Un animal bruto, di tal e tanto temperamento, mosso da tal oggetto non può far se non così, e se questo chiamano istinto naturale, dicon bene*"; Frajese 1994, pp. 101–102. See also, Sosio 1996b, p. 549.

> All women carry children in their arms, not because it is natural, nor because of a subtle invention of the mind. Therefore, accordingly, animals make their nests in one particular way, because such instruments are apt to be used that way, and not in another, or more easily in the way they are used.[15]

Thus, Sarpi argued that women did not carry children in their arms because they had deliberately decided to do so, but because their arms were such instruments that they were apt for carrying children. In his opinion, then, man's conduct was sometimes dictated by his physical structure rather than by his cognitive action and decisions. For Sarpi, whenever man operated according to his physical condition, his action was natural. At the same time, he suggested that such natural behavior was being replaced by responses generated by increasingly complex cognitive processes of man. It is unclear, however, whether he considered the increasingly complex human behavior a cause or the result of what could be called a culture of masks and pretense. This sort of alienation from natural behavior manifested itself in man's orientation towards the unnatural: "the human appetite does not content itself just with natural and necessary things, but it desires also natural and unnecessary things, and also those which are neither necessary nor natural".[16] In keeping with Charron's concept of the moral superiority of animals, Sarpi asserted the absence of unnaturalness in animal behavior. "Irrational animals seek only natural and necessary pleasures", he wrote, and this was what "the perfect man would do". Most men were imperfect, however, and "the mediocre wants also the natural and unnecessary", while "the vicious, not content with those, wants also the unnatural ones".[17]

Not surprisingly, Charron and Montaigne had a similar interpretation of desires. Charron noted that some desires were "naturall" and existed "likewise in beasts". Montaigne in turn specified that

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15 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 550, pp. 411–412: "*Tutte le donne in braccio portano i figli, non per ispecie naturale, né per sottile invenzion di ragione. Così dunque gl'animali fanno i nidi a un modo perché, sendo i tali stromenti atti ad esser adoprati così, e non altrimenti, o più facilmente così, in quella maniera s'adoprano*".

16 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 277, p. 235: "*L'appetito umano non solo delle cose naturali e necessarie non si contenta, ma pur anco appetisce le cose naturali non necessarie, poi quelle che né necessarie né naturali sono*".

17 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 255, p. 225: "*Gl'irragionevoli animali cercan solamente le voluttà naturali e necessarie, come farebbe l'uom perfetto, poiché il mediocre vuol ancor le naturali non necessarie, e il vizioso, di lor non contentandosi, le non naturali ancora vuole*".

> the passions are either natural and necessary, like drinking and eating; or natural but not necessary, like associating with women; or neither natural nor necessary; of this last type are almost all human desires; they are superfluous and artificial.[18]

This classification of desires was Epicurean of origin.[19] Epicurus divided the desires into the natural and the necessary, and concluded that the right understanding of these things gave rise to a blessed life, which consisted of a healthy body and a peaceful mind.[20] The question for sixteenth-century thinkers nonetheless remained, how to reach the right understanding of these things. Sarpi argued that this was a difficult enterprise, since man struggled with the confusing mess of excessive information and the overwhelming power of his own passions: the "variety of our (desires) can lead to the worse, as the abundance of the information can lead to an error".[21] Animals had it better, Sarpi implied, since they operated naturally, instinctively, and therefore, effortlessly. Some people praised men who overcame difficulties and scorned those to whom everything seemed easy, but Sarpi disagreed:

> A dog despises gold and so does a cynic, the latter with difficulty, the former with no effort at all. Which one is better? Somebody would say the cynic, who is to be praised because he has overcome difficulties, while the dog has done it effortlessly and naturally, and thus does not deserve any praise . . . on the contrary, if the quintessence of virtue is to operate with pleasure, it is clear that the one who operates in accordance with nature, operates with pleasure.[22]

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18 Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. I, chap. xxiii, p. 85; Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. xii, p. 180: "*Les cupidites sont ou naturelles et nécessaires, comme le boire et le manger; ou naturelles et non nécessaires, comme l'accointance des femelles; ou elles ne sont ni naturelles ni nécessaires; de cette dernière sorte sont quasi toutes celles des hommes'* ".

19 See Luisa Cozzi's remark in, Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 236.

20 Diogenes Laertius, bk. X, 120.

21 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 255, p. 225: "*Quella varietà dunque nostra può servire al peggio, siccome l'ampiezza delle notizie a errore*".

22 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 253, p. 224: "*Il cane sprezza l'oro e lo sprezza il cinico, questo con fatica e senza fatica quello: che cosa è meglio? Taluno direbbe il cinico, a cui devesi lode, perché ha superate difficoltà, ma il cane ha fatto senza fatica e da natura spinto, perciò lode non merita . . . anzi se l'essenziale della virtù è operar dilettevolmente, chiara cosa è che chi opera conforme alla natura dilettevolmente opera*".

Here Sarpi derived pleasure from naturalness, which for him amounted to "the quintessence of virtue". In so doing he drew on one of the central tenets of Epicureanism, according to which ease and naturalness went hand in hand with pleasure. "All natural things are achieved easily", Epicurus maintained, "but those unnecessary with difficulty". According to Epicurus pleasure was a standard for measuring good and desirable things, because it told man what to reach for and what to avoid.[23] While Sarpi put more emphasis on naturalness than on pleasure, the former nonetheless was for him a similar criterion as the latter was for Epicurus. Broadly speaking, both men saw little difference between naturalness and pleasure.

The Deceptions of Language

Sarpi believed that the gradual decay of man's character was manifested by education, false opinion, and the ability to talk and thereby disseminate false information. Adults, he argued, had many opinions, which seemed to create just as many fears. In contrast, mere opinions did not seem to generate fear amongst children. Sarpi nonetheless lamented the fact that over time children became "instructed in the false opinion" and consequently learned to fear many things. He remarked that there were people who thought that "children know all the truths before they can talk, and learn the falsehoods concurrently with speech". This suggests that Sarpi posited the existence of at least some sort of a truth, accessible to children and the innocent, those not yet corrupted by speech. It was the task of philosophy to guide us back to the innocent and natural state of clarity. As we have already seen, in Sarpi's opinion the purpose of philosophy and "all our studies" was to "uncover the deceptions of the words and concepts".[24]

What should we make of the apparent contradiction here? Falsehoods were produced by education and ability to talk, but, on the other hand, Sarpi argued that the very same things that led to this sort of corruption, namely "studies" and "philosophies", were the remedy against deception and false information. It is likely that Sarpi distinguished between ordinary education, which included the ability to talk, and a higher, philosophical learning with the specific aim to

23 Diogenes Laertius, bk. X, 129–130.

24 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, nos. 552–553, pp. 414–415: "*Alcuni popoli hanno l'opinione che i fanciulini avanti di parlare sappiano tutto 'l vero, e con parlare il falso imparino . . . ogni nostro studio ed ogni nostra filosofia tende a scoprir gl'inganni delle parole e ancor dei concetti*". See also Sosio 1996b, pp. 550–552.

detect inconsistencies and falsehoods in what was the product of a less critical education. This suggests that Sarpi regarded learning as an inherently self-corrective process, an instrument of progress rather than decay. However, his concept of learning was related to his understanding of the passions, which in turn suggests that he saw learning as something flawed an imperfect. Indeed, Sarpi acknowledged two different kinds of passion: one based on opinion and another that issued from sense experience.[25] The first was futile and, as we have seen, absent in children, while the latter (for example, the fear of fire) was necessary for self-preservation. Sarpi argued that the passions which were based on sense experience were natural, unlike those based on opinion. Animals and children only had natural passions, but adult men had become alienated from their original condition as a result of their reason, education and opinions. Sarpi's criticism of reason, learning and unnatural passions was in line with his Augustinian idea of the fallen man and man's inability to redeem himself without divine help. According to this line of thought, man was slave to his own imperfection. Sarpi claimed that one should never be surprised at any human "action or opinion", because nothing appeared to be too "absurd" for having been made a law and "that what is a fairy tale today, used to be an article of faith".[26] While catering for his absolutistic political theory, Sarpi's pessimistic view of man also pointed towards a strong sense of relativism and scepticism with regard to religious and scientific dogmas.

Illusion of Happiness

If we are to believe Paolo Paruta's *Della perfettione della vita politica* (1579)—one of the most typical treatises of the period to champion the salutary outcomes of the *vita activa*—the ethos of the sixteenth-century Venetian nobility was optimistic and entrepreneurial. The discussants of Paruta's book intended to show that "the true human happiness is attainable, but neither by living in solitude, nor by contemplation", but by "operating virtuously" in "cities". This lifestyle was called "politica".[27] However, in his *Soliloqvio*, a short text written

25 Kainulainen 2010, p. 12.

26 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, pp. 626–627: "*Non ti maravigliare mai di azzione o opinione alcuna perché non vi è cosa così absurda, che non sia stata piantata per legge: e quello ch'oggi è favola, fu già articolo di fede*".

27 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 60: "*la vera felicità umana da noi conseguir si possa, non nelle solitudini vivendo né dando opera alle speculazioni; ma ben usando nelle città e in esse virtuosamente operando*". See also, pp. 90–92.

in his old age, Paruta quite srikingly lamented the way he had spent his life, devoting himself to the "administration of the property" and the "affairs of the republic". Instead of the public life, Paruta now yearned for religious contemplation and retreat: "Oh fathers, oh good fathers", he wrote, "you who inside your cloisters, far away . . . from the world and from its troubles, live in the sweetest quiet".[28] Was it only old age and the weariness that may come with it, or was it also a change in the political culture in Venice that spurred Paruta to write this complaint? While we cannot know for sure, the general tone of the *Soliloqvio* is pessimistic, or, more precisely, one full of disdain for human affairs as it is of praise for God. Although Paruta's style in the *Soliloqvio* is more personal and sentimental than that of Sarpi, pessimism and disdain were features common to both writers.

While Paruta longed for cloistral life, Sarpi examined happiness in a more analytical manner. Faithful to his terse writing style, Sarpi condensed the essence of happiness into a syllogism: "happiness is perfection, perfection is that which does not lack anything: happiness is thus self-sufficiency".[29] This condensed comment was followed by a division of self-sufficiency (or happiness) into three categories, of which the first and most perfect was "to need nothing, not even oneself"; second, "to need only oneself"; and the third, "to have everything one needs".[30] It was characteristic of Sarpi that here too he referred to motion. The happiness of the first category had nothing to do with motion, but neither with rest, because it was simply "absence of misery" (*mancamento di miseria*). The second category "does not consist of motion, but of rest". However, the idea of "total rest" or immobility was an illusion and therefore "such happiness is called Stoic and imaginary and it does not exist".[31] All that remained was an idea of it and, Sarpi specified, this kind of felicity too was merely a state without misery. The third kind of happiness involved motion and activity. The nature of motion, however, was problematic: it is "one of

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28 Paruta, *Soliloqvio*, p. 688: "*amministratione di robba, negotij della Republica*"; p. 686: "*Ò Padri, ò buoni Padri, che dentro a' vostri chiostri, lontani . . . dal mondo, & dalle sue cure, vivete in una soavissima quiete*".

29 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 250, p. 221: "*La felicità è perfezione, perfetto è quello* cui nihil deest: *la felicità dunque sarà* autarkeia".

30 Sarpi *Pensieri*, no. 250, p. 221: "*nullo indigere, nec seipso . . . indigere seipso tantum . . . habere omnia quibus indiget*".

31 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 250, p. 221: "*nel moto non consiste la felicità, ma nella quiete. Impossibil però essendo che alcuna cosa del mondo stia in total quiete né si muova, quindi una tal felicità si dice stoica ed immaginaria e che non è*". I have preferred to translate the word "*quiete*" with "rest" instead of the more alike "quiet", since the "rest" expresses better the contrariness to "motion".

those things that have always been and that never are". Thus, Sarpi concluded bleakly that "we are always searching for happiness, but we have never found it and we never will".[32]

Sarpi's theory of happiness bears a resemblance to that of Hobbes. Hobbes claimed that happiness was "continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth", but, in the end, "there is no such thing as perpetuall tranquility of mind, while we live here". In keeping with Sarpi's theory of motion, Hobbes inferred that the lack of perpetual tranquility issued from the fact that "life it selfe is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without feare, no more than without sense". Man was governed by desires, or appetites, and in order to pursue happiness, he was destined to chase the object of his desires, "from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later".[33] Here Hobbes described the same vicious circle, which Sarpi referred to as the condition of having everything one needs and at the same time being exposed to ceaseless motion, which rendered true happiness an illusion.

In another *pensiero* Sarpi returned to the question of happiness in terms of Stoic philosophy. Although absolute happiness was unachievable, there remained a possibility of attaining a reasonable one:

> We have regarded absolute happiness as impossible, while indeed as possible that which everyone is capable of. It consists of equilibrium of mind . . . it is as well understood as the fact that mere virtue is sufficient for a happy life. It makes one enjoy the present and not worry about absent, and it also makes you adapt yourself to place, people and time.[34]

While the reference to the equilibrium of mind was an allusion to the Stoic *apatheia*, the idea of virtue as something conducive to happiness may have been a reference to Epicurus' statement that the purpose of man is "a life in agreement with nature, which is the same as a virtuous life".[35] The quotation

32 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 250, 221: "*una di quelle cose che* semper fuerunt et numquam sunt . . . *resta perciò che noi sempre stiamo in acquistar la felicità, né mai acquistata l'abbiamo o l'avremo*".

33 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 7, pp. 129–130; chap. 11, pp. 160–161.

34 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 400, p. 304: "*L'assoluta felicità fu da noi creduta impossibile, ma ben possibil quella di cui ciascuno è capace. Sta ella nella composizion d'animo . . . Così bene intendesi, come alla vita felice sia bastante la sola virtù. Questa fa* praesentibus frui, absentium non esse sollicitum, accommodari locis, personis, temporibus". I have followed Luisa Cozzi's remark in her annotation to this *pensiero* and translated the "*composizion d'animo*" as "equilibrium of mind". Cozzi equates it to "*equilibrio interiore*".

35 Diogenes Laërtius, bk. VII, 87.

also has a relativistic aspect, which recalls the ancient sceptics' rejection of natural good and natural evil. According to Sextus Empiricus, for instance, acknowledging the existence of absolute good and evil only led to a situation in which man "for all of his life" pursues the good and tries to evade the evil. What is more, "he will never be free of perturbation", because of the desire for good (and the worry over maintaining it) and the anxiety caused by the concept of evil. It was best to consider everything relative. This way he who aspires to avoid things "according to the different occasions and circumstances . . . accepting firmly that what happens to him necessarily", shall live happily. According to Sextus Empiricus, happiness was possible only when one believed that "nothing is *per natura* good or evil".[36] Although Sarpi did not explicitly refer to the problem of natural good and evil, he assumed the relativistic position by identifying a happy life with the capability to adapt oneself to "the place, people and time". In his opinion, a reasonable degree of happiness was attainable through a combination of stoic apathy, Epicurean naturalness and the moral flexibility of the ancient sceptics.[37] Adaptability was crucial, because nothing in life was stable. Even pleasure, the quintessence of virtue, consisted of motion. Sarpi rejected Aquinas' claim that pleasure was similar to rest and asserted that "it is motion that does not dissipate".[38] Perhaps not surprisingly at all, Sarpi elaborated a theory of happiness which suited perfectly his own mercurial personality and the culture of masks he lived in.

In general, many sixteenth-century writers located the ultimate good in heaven or in the contemplation of God. According to the Venetian Giovanni Maria Memmo, for instance, religion was the "mother and conservator" of all virtues and philosophers only wasted their time when they tried to find happiness in science. While doing so they looked for answers in "base things" instead

36 Sextus Empiricus, *Contro i moralisti*, 116–118, pp. 216–217: "*non sarà mai libero da perturbazione, ma, quando non avrà ancora afferrato il bene, sarà fortemente perturbato per la brama di ottenerlo . . . il male . . . incessantemente lo tormenta l'ansia di evitarlo . . . perché ciascuna evenienza rientra nel novero delle cose relative e, a seconda delle differenti occasioni e circostanze, ora risulta da scegliere e ora da fuggire, quest' uomo vivrà felice . . . accettando con fortezza ciò che gli capita per necessità . . . E ciò gli sarà possibile in virtù del fatto che egli opina che nulla 'per natura' è bene o male*".

37 For the Stoic and Epicurean elements in Sarpi's theory of happiness, see Amerio 1950, p. 30. In her footnote to the *pensiero* no. 250 on page 222, in Sarpi, *Pensieri*, Luisa Cozzi observes that Sarpi's idea of perfect happiness as not needing anything, not even *seipso*, resembles the ancient Cynics' identification of happiness with non-existence.

38 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 250, p. 222: "*Errò quindi S. Tommaso dicendo che la voluttà è simile alla quiete, perché moto è che non dissipa*".

of heaven and God, in whom the "supreme good is placed".[39] As we have seen, Sarpi was sceptical about science and human reason. On the other hand, he frequently asserted that divine matters were incomprehensible to man, which is why it has been observed that Sarpi was "an inheritor of the late medieval notion of the *Deus absconditus* (the hidden God)".[40] Where, then, did Sarpi locate happiness, if not in science or contemplation of God? In the first place, his life and personality were dominated by his willingness to serve. In this respect his concept of happiness was linked to the *vita activa*, although not in the republican sense of the term. It is clear that solitary studies and contemplation did not suffice for Sarpi. His idea of happiness was pragmatic and consisted of serving the republic of Venice, an activity, which he ultimately identified with the service that he wanted to perform to God.

Culture of Masks and Relativism

As discussed above, Sarpi lamented man's incapability to attain true knowledge and his failure to limit his desires to natural and necessary things. He no doubt saw the connection between these shortcomings and his own relativistic worldview on the one hand and the seventeenth-century habit of wearing masks on the other. While Sarpi promptly embraced relativism, his adoption of a mask and a feigned character was not an uncomplicated process. This was nevertheless an indispensable property in a culture of carnevals, mask plays, *commedia dell'arte* and Machiavellian deceit. Guicciardini's maxims, for instance, reveal in a remarkably outspoken way the ways in which a Renaissance courtier deliberately concealed, simulated and misled whenever necessary to protect his own interests. Constant caution and suspicion were the most expedient attitudes of the wise courtier: "the most important thing is to trust no one, if not certain that it can be done".[41] In contrast to Guicciardini's deep-rooted mistrust, Sarpi's puzzlement in front of doge Leonardo Donà at an early stage of his political career might suggest unfamiliarity with the habits of statesmanship: "one never knows whether he loves or hates something", Sarpi said of Donà and noted that although he had often discussed the relations

39 Memmo, *Dialogo*, p. 47: "*religione, madre & conservatrice di tutte l'e altre virtù*", p. 53: "*i filosofi adunque, che hanno cercata la felicità nella scienza, overo nella virtù, son caminati per buona strada, ma . . . non hanno cercato il sommo bene nell'altezza . . . ma nelle cose basse, & terrene: percioche in vero il sommo bene è posto in cielo, sede di Dio*".

40 Logan 1996, p. 502.

41 Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, no. 201, p. 235: "*sustanziale è: non vi fidate se non vedete poterlo fare*".

between Venice and Rome with the doge, he still could not tell whether Donà liked or hated his contribution.[42]

The rules of pretense were often regarded as useful educational advice for one's offspring. Guicciardini's maxims are an example of such piece of writing, common amongst humanists, which was produced for edifying purposes within his own family. As a basic rule, he advised his children to "deny always that what you do not want the others to know" and to "confirm that what you want them to believe".[43] It was nevertheless sensible to be honest, because everyone praised integrity; pretense as such was reproachable, although a useful tool when used wisely:

> I praise such a person, who is usually open and sincere, and who resorts to pretense only on some very important and rare occasions. In this way one can gain the reputation of an open and sincere person and, at the same time, all the esteem that is given to such persons. However, in more important matters you could gain profit by pretense, and even on a larger scale than usually, because as a person of an honest reputation others would believe you more easily.[44]

By 1609 Sarpi had fully adopted the culture of masks as we can judge from his letter of 12 May to Jacques Gillot: "my nature is such that, like a chameleon, I adopt the disposition of those with whom I discuss". He admitted that he was "forced to wear a mask", since it was likely that "in Italy no one could live without one".[45] Furthermore, according to the German burgrave Christoph von Dohna (1583–1637) Sarpi had said that "I never speak falsehoods, but I do not

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42 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, p. 122: "*Non si conosce mai se ami o odii una cosa . . . Io gliene ho detto qualche cosa . . . mai non ho potuto sentire se l'aggradisse o odiasse*".

43 Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, no. 37, p. 55: "*Nega pure sempre quello che tu non vuoi che si sappia, o afferma quello che tu vuoi che si creda*". See also nos. 86 and 88.

44 Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, no. 104, p. 128: "*io loderei chi ordinariamente avessi el traino suo del vivere libero e schietto, usando la simulazione solamente in qualche cosa molto importante, le quali accaggiono rare volte. Così acquisteresti nome di essere libero e reale, e ti tireresti drieto quella grazia che ha chi è tenuto di tale natura: e nondimeno, nelle cose che importassino più, caveresti utilità della simulazione, e tanto maggiore quanto, avendo fama di non essere simulatore, sarebbe più facilmente creduto alle arti tue*".

45 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 133: "*Ego eius ingenii sum, ut velut chamaeleon, a conversantibus mores sumam . . . Personam, coactus fero; licet in Italia nemo sine ea esse possit*".

tell the truth to everyone".[46] Sarpi distinguished between lying and merely concealing the truth, a difference pointed out by St. Augustine who said of Christ that he never spoke a falsehood, but held back many truths. The Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam in turn appreciated flexibility and compromise to such an extent that he—like Sarpi—compared himself to a chameleon and claimed that it was sometimes right for a pious man to dissimulate.[47]

In general, Sarpi's attitude promoted hypocrisy. He claimed that it was impossible to persuade common opinion (*universale*) into line with one's own point of view. It was best not to say a word against the majority and to "discuss more with oneself than with the others". There was no fear of being exposed, he believed, if one was well disguised. However, he continued, if you want to expose "your face", choose carefully the people to whom you are going to open yourself, and keep in mind Epicurus' saying: "we are a big enough theatre for each other".[48] All this suggests that Venice was troubled by an atmosphere of fear and suspicion a fact, which questions the myth of civic freedom so often ascribed to the republic. The feeling of distrust was undoubtedly intensified by the executions in Rome of Giordano Bruno in 1600 and Fulgenzio Manfredi in 1609. Both were personal acquaintances of Sarpi, the latter having been his colleague as an adviser to the senate of Venice. In such circumstances it was only natural for Sarpi to prefer discussions in small groups, among the company of close and reliable friends like Fulgenzio Micanzio, Andrea Morosini, Nicolò Contarini, Sebastiano Venier and Giovanni Francesco Sagredo.[49] This division into a public and a private sphere also shows in the dualism of Sarpi's writings (*consulti* and *pensieri*). The multitude, or crowd, represented for Sarpi a power that could be restrained only with great difficulties. Individuals were helpless

46 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, p. 123: "*Le falsità non dico mai mai, ma la verità non a ogni uno*". Von Dohna met Sarpi frequently when he spent the summer 1608 in Venice as an envoy of the Calvinist prince Christian of Anhalt.

47 Zagorin 1990, pp. 24–37. For the difference between simulation and dissimulation, see Burke 1991, p. 482, who notes that "simulation and dissimulation" are "the opposite but complementary arts of appearing to be what you are not and of not appearing to be what you really are".

48 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, p. 626: "*minimum cum aliis loqui, plurimum secum . . . Satis magnum alter alteri theatrum sumus*".

49 For Sarpi's friends, see Cozzi 1969, p. 22; Cozzi 1979, pp. 224–225; Cozzi 1995, p. 46; Wootton 1983, pp. 64–65; Pin 2002, p. 843. Andrea Morosini (probably Contarini too) was Sarpi's schoolmate and thus a lifelong friend. Interestingly, both Morosini and Contarini (who were cousins) held the post of the official historian of Venice, and Sarpi in turn wrote one of the most remarkable histories of the whole era (*Istoria del concilio tridentino*).

in its flow and, Sarpi observed, "the one who walks in the crowd, cannot go straight", which is why "the common opinion" was a force to be reckoned with.[50] To Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), the Geneva-born classical scholar Sarpi wrote with gloom that "there shall be madness, as long as there shall be men".[51]

Sarpi's willingness to disguise himself and to converse only with close friends suggests a further discrepancy between him and the republican tradition of political thought. The latter cherished civic freedom and equal participation in political affairs, while Sarpi advocated masks, secrecy and strict hierarchical order. The case of a friendship between two Venetian patricians, Nicolò Barbarigo and Marco Trevisano, however, suggests that Sarpi resented the culture of masks. Barbarigo's and Trevisano's example offers a good illustration of what could happen to those members of the republic who dared to defy the common opinion.[52] Trevisano defended his friend against other patricians who had defamed Barbarigo. This defence cost him the support of his family and old friends. Abandoned by his own family and thus forced to live with Barbarigo and his wife, Trevisano nevertheless gained the admiration of Sarpi, Micanzio and Nicolò Contarini. Of these at least Sarpi and Micanzio were already old friends of his. Sarpi met with Trevisano regularly and, according to Micanzio, was pleased to have met someone with whom it was possible to talk without a mask.[53] Sarpi's appreciation for this sincere communication was such that he made it known that Trevisano was always to be allowed to enter his cell. Furthermore, Sarpi asked Micanzio to translate Montaigne's essay *De l'amitié* into Italian and to give it as a present to the two friends who, in the name of friendship, had risked their social status and all that went with it.[54] Challenging the formidable power of common opinion with such frankness and devotion aroused unreserved admiration from Sarpi and his friends. At the Same time, Sarpi's attitude towards the case only shows that he valued friendship and sincere conversations in his private life. As far as political affairs were concerned, he remained loyal to the culture of masks and secrecy.

Like Sarpi, Micanzio too was in the habit of writing *pensieri*, brief philosophical thoughts. One of his *pensieri* centres on the difference between the

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50 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, p. 618: "*Non può caminar dritto chi camina nella folla*"; "*quanto devi stimare l'opinion comune*".

51 Sarpi, *Opere*, 17 August 1610, p. 290: "*Vi saranno follie, finché vi saranno uomini*".

52 For an account of this friendship, see the study *Una vicenda della Venezia barocca. Marco Trevisan e la sua "eroica amicizia"* by Cozzi, reprinted in Cozzi 1995, pp. 325–409. See also, Miller 2001.

53 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1393: "*Lodato Iddio, che ho pur trovato uno che mi parla non in maschera*".

54 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1394.

"mad" and the "imprudent" and touches on the same theme of the need to wear a mask:

> It is not possible to converse without a mask; who would really reveal all that crosses one's mind, my God! But everyone has infinite masks, they are taken away and put on, according to the person one talks with, and they are changed in every moment. If there are two who discuss and a third arrives, it is necessary to change. Now, the imprudent errs by putting on a mask that is not suitable to be used with the person he talks with . . . the madman, then, errs because he wants to say everything to everybody and believes that it is necessary.[55]

The governmental system of Venice with its numerous councils and restricted number of patricians holding offices created an environment in which everybody knew one another and gossip could have grave consequences for an individual's career. Such conditions made prudence a vital necessity.[56] Micanzio remarked of republican form of government that "governing as it does", it "has a need for a continuous intrigue". This in turn "makes men of necessity simulating, artificial in speech, adulators, obliging in words and short in deeds" so that they "ingratiate themselves to everyone and offend no one".[57] "Conscience and prudence" were needed in order to prevent everything from turning into "deceit, lies and perjuries". This kind of corruption, Micanzio asserted, "is the defect of republics".[58] It would be unreasonable to expect all of Micanzio's opinions to match perfectly with those of Sarpi, but the two friars certainly

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55 Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 156, p. 844: "*Non è possibile conversar se non in mascara; chi palesasse realmente tutto che passa per mente, oh Dio! Ma ciascuno ha mascare infinite, le cava e mette, secondo con chi tratta, e muta ad ogni momento; se ragioniamo in dui, e viene un terzo, è necessario mutare. Ora, l'imprudente erra mettendo la mascara che non conviene con colui che tratta . . . Il pazzo modo erra perché vuol dir tutto a tutti, e crede esser necessario*".

56 See Cozzi 1995, pp. 334–335, for the necessity of conformity in the Venetian society, where "*l'isolamento era la fine*", and where it was necessary to "*sottostare agli umori e alle esigenze dei più, piegandosi al conformismo, o reagendo con discrezione e con moderazione*".

57 Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 173, p. 849: "*La Republica, verbigrazia, governando come fa, ha necessario del continuo broglio; questo per necessità fa gl'uomini dissimulati, artificiosi nel parlare, adulatori, officiosi di detti e scarsi di effetti, per gratificarsi tutti, non disgustar alcuno*".

58 Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 173, p. 849: "*La conscienzia e prudenza è quella che modera che da questo trattare non si passi ad inganno, bugie, spergiuri: al che però la porta è molto aperta. Questo è difetto delle republiche*".

agreed on many things and Micanzio can be used as a valuable source for any research on Sarpi.[59]

Living in an environment replete with "continuous intrigue" made Sarpi prudent and circumspect. He rarely spoke without reserve as we can judge from a letter to Jacques Leschassier:

> When something is to be said, I place the whole truth in front of my eyes; then I use that part of it, which I consider suitable for the current audience. In order to substitute those parts that I conceal, I do not, however, put forth anything contrary, so that the road will remain open for advancing further, and I will not contradict my own words.[60]

To tolerate or even recommend pretense was common among early-modern thinkers. Sarpi wore a mask, Micanzio regarded plotting as an innate feature of republics, and Justus Lipsius tolerated not only dissimulation, but, to a certain extent, even deception.[61] This indicates a deepening gap between ethics and politics, as well as the wide dissemination of reason of state theories. At the same time, however, it is likely that rulers have always employed dissimulation as a tool for governing. Lipsius for example quoted the old dictum "who cannot dissimulate, cannot reign".[62] In striking contrast to these examples, Michel de Montaigne attacked both pretense and flattery: "I prefer being importunate and indescreet rather than a flatterer and a dissimulator".[63] He disapproved of the

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59 For Micanzio's contribution to Sarpi's correspondence, see Da Pozzo 1968, p. 73; De Vivo 2006, p. 239; and for the similarity of concepts used by Sarpi and Micanzio, see Benzoni 1982, pp. 754–755. Benzoni also points out that Sarpi did not monopolize the conversations he had with Micanzio, but the latter was an "*interlocutore*".

60 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 109: "*Ubi aliquid dicendum est, integram veritatem prae oculis pono; ex ea eam partem desumo, quae auribus temporis accommodari possit. Iis partibus, quas silentio tego, non tamen aliquid contrarium profero, ut semper aperta via maneat, per quam ulterius progredi possim, neque mihi ipsi pugnantia dicam*". The idea of the last sentence is repeated in *Massime*, in *Pensieri*, p. 707: "*Non dir mai cosa contraria ai tuoi portamenti che sono in veduta per non mentir le tue parole*". See also Ulianich 1961, p. cxxxix.

61 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 133: "*Fraus . . . triplex: Levis, Media, Magna . . . illam suadeo, hanc tolero, istam damno*". Tenenti 1999, p. 74, argues that Sarpi's way of being between the "*essere*" and the "*parere*" is one of the characteristics of modernity.

62 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 135: "*Nescit regnare, qui nescit dissimulare*"; Burke 1991, p. 487, attributes the saying to Louis XI of France.

63 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. 17, p. 408: "*j'aime mieux être importun et indiscret que flatteur et dissimulé*".

maxim *nescit regnare, qui nescit dissimulare* and declared truth "the first and fundamental part of virtue". Montaigne's "soul refused to lie", but he admitted that "one does not always have to tell everything, since that would be stupidity". What one says, however, "has to correspond to one's thoughts, otherwise it is a miserable thing".[64] Although Sarpi wore a mask, he did not always wear it with ease: "in other centuries", he wrote to Groslot de l'Isle in 1609, "hypocrisy has made some progress; but in this century it dominates alone", while all "true piety" has perished.[65] Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the word 'dissimulation' appears approximately a hundred times in Sarpi's history of the council of Trent and always as a negative concept, as one used to describe the characteristic 'virtue' of the Roman curia.[66] Sarpi's view of masks and pretense suggests that he made a clear distinction between the private and the public. In his private life he objected to the culture of masks, but within the public sphere he acknowledged the necessity of simulation. He wore masks, but—as his scornful identification of dissimulation with Roman 'virtue' shows—did not hesitate to criticize others of doing the same.

Caught between the culture of masks and his personal distaste for pretense Sarpi found relief in relativism. His understanding of aesthetics, for instance, was thoroughly relativistic and left no room for absolute, objective ideals. According to him "the beautiful and the ugly do not possess a real existence, but they are opinions". Ideas about beauty varied not only from one country to another, but also between individuals, since what is considered "most beautiful" by one person, may appear "most ugly" to another.[67] In addition to this, Sarpi's relativism extended to ethical questions. All "morals" vary "in time and place", he wrote, and eventually "become their own opposites", which means that they are "nothing but opinions, which are born and die because of the alteration".[68] The root of Sarpi's relativism lied in his epistemological scepticism and, more precisely, in his view that all human knowledge was little

64 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. 17, p. 406: "*C'est* (*vérité*) *la première et fondamentale partie de la vertu . . . Mon âme . . . refuit la menterie . . . Il ne faut pas toujours dire tout, car ce serait sottise; mais ce qu'on dit, il faut qu'il soit tel qu'on le pense, autrement, c'est méchanceté*".

65 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 83: "*In altri secoli la ipocrisia ha avuto qualche corso; ma in questo ella domina sola, esclusa ogni vera pietá*".

66 Ulianich 1979, p. 191.

67 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 468, p. 352: "*Il bello e il bruto non hanno esistenza reale, ma son opinioni . . . il bello si varia non sol da paese a paese, ma da persona a persona, stimando taluno bellissima una cosa, che l'altro bruttissima stimerà*". See also the *pensiero* no. 424.

68 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 471, p. 353: "*Chi anderà considerando le morali tutte, e vedrà come per tempi e luoghi si variino, di modo che passino al suo contrario, assolutamente conchiuderà che non sono altro fuorché opinioni, le quali per alterazione nascono e muoiono*".

more than a set of opinions. His reading of Montaigne and Charron, the two famous sceptics and relativists of the period, clearly reinforced this tendency in his thought.[69]

There were issues, however, which penetrated through Sarpi's philosophical detachment. What most strikingly contradicted his otherwise relativistic and prudent attitude was the unremitting passion with which he attacked the clergy's engagement in political affairs. Apart from his fideism, this was the only instance when Sarpi transcended the boundaries of his sceptic relativism and showed a clear commitment to a cause. This suggests that, at least on some occasions, he considered it possible to distinguish between right and wrong. Not surprisingly, he asserted that the right course of action was always in accordance with the will of God:

> Nothing more correct is said, than that good action is that which is in conformity with the right reason; the right reason in turn is that which is in conformity with the right appetite; right appetite is indeed the will of God, and it appears to men as that which is approved of by everyone or by majority or by those, who are considered to be prudent: whence Aristotle said that the virtue consists of medium, as far as the prudent man is to be determined.[70]

In the next *pensiero* Sarpi specified that the things done by everyone, and moreover, done in accordance with their appetite, conformed to right reason, whereas those which clashed with the reason of everyone or with that of some people were excessive or smaller vices. He then concluded the *pensiero* with a relativistic observation: "in different countries men have different constitutions, whence different education, whence different appetites, and from this arises the variety of honourable and disgraceful things".[71] It followed from this that what was considered "good action" in Venice could be regarded as something disgraceful in Africa. Moreover, appetite, right reason and good action were based on local traditions and determined by the will of the majority.

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69 For the scepticism and relativism of Montaigne and Charron, see Popkin 1979, pp. 42–65; Kogel 1972, p. 134.

70 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 259, p. 227: "*Nihil rectius dicitur quam eam actionem esse bonam, quae rectae rationi conformis est; recta vero est ratio, quae appetitui recto est conformis; rectus appetitus vere est voluntas Dei, hominibus autem ille videtur, qui probatur omnibus aut pluribus aut iis, qui prudentes putantur: unde Aristoteles dixit virtutem in mediocritate consistere, prout vir prudens determinaverit*".

71 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 260, p. 228; "*perché in diversi paesi hanno gl'uomini diversa complessione, onde diversa educazione, onde appetiti diversi, perciò nasce la varietà dell'onesto e del vergognoso*".

At the same time, they always conformed to divine law and grace, as Sarpi asserted in one of his maxims.[72]

In order to do good or participate in the right course of action an individual had to comply with the common norms. "Restrict your will", Sarpi urged, "within the limits of common opinions . . . inwardly live and think according to reason, outwardly live and talk according to the common opinion".[73] The same idea was expressed by Montaigne who argued that "the wise has to save his soul inwardly from the pressure" so that his soul remains "in liberty" and capable of "judging freely over things". Outwardly, however, "he has to follow perfectly the accepted manners and forms".[74] The commonness of pretense in every day life is mirrored by the popularity of the principle, which also numbered amongst Cesare Cremonini's maxims: "inwardly as you like, outwardly according to the custom".[75] While it might seem that such freedom of thought, which was not given any outward expression, was in fact little more than a token of oppression, the principle in question was nevertheless understood as a means to guarantee at least some degree of freedom in a period when religious strife led both temporal and ecclesiastical authorities to strengthen their control over individuals' thoughts and beliefs. That this sort of private and silenced freedom was still considered a freedom in relation to human authorities was intimated by the French theologian Jacques Almain (died in 1515) who declared that "the Church can do nothing about sins of heart which have not resulted in an external act . . . God reserved these to His own judgment", while it pertained to men themselves to judge all external matters. It is worth mentioning that here Almain drew on the fourteenth-century French theologian Durandus of Saint-Pourçain's *Super quatuor sententiarum*, of which Sarpi possessed a copy.[76]

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72 Sarpi, *Massime*, in *Pensieri*, p. 704: "*nessun buon ordine ripugna alla divina grazia né la lege de Dio è contraria alla retta ragione*".

73 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, in *Pensieri*, p. 626: "*restringi il tuo volere entro li termini delle opinioni comuni . . . Al di dentro vivi e giudica secondo la ragione, al di fuori secondo la comune opinione vivi e parla*".

74 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. I, chap. 23, p. 185: "*le sage doit au-dedans retirer son âme de la presse, et la tenir en liberté et puissance de juger librement des choses; mais, quant au-dehors, qu'il doit suivre entièrement les facons et formes recues*".

75 I quote from Wootton 1983, p. 16: "*intus ut libet, forus ut moris est*". Frajese 1994, p. 112, points out that the idea dates back to Seneca's *Ad Lucilium*, I, V.

76 Almain, *A book concerning the authority of the Church*, p. 145. The footnote 30 identifies the passage of Durandus which Almain refers to as *In IV Sent. D. 18 q. I*. Masetti Zannini 1970, p. 199, confirms that Sarpi possessed Durandus' *Super quatuor sententiarum*, Antverpiae 1567.

'Occasione'

In the early stages of the clash between Venice and Rome Sarpi approached the interdict crisis as an invigorating opportunity to reform the problematic relations between ecclesiastical and temporal powers, although afterwards he complained to Giacomo Badoer that participating in politics had weakened his health and spirit. In general, the letter to Badoer attests to the profoundly pessimistic nature of Sarpi's character. Drawing on Epicurus, Sarpi remarked that "our existence" is "a triviality and it is suitable to laugh at the idea of losing it".[77] The full extent of his pessimism and, perhaps, disappointment at the outcome of the interdict conflict becomes manifest at the end of the letter: "I find myself so tired of life that I think it is time to leave it", Sarpi complained and claimed that he had "lost all the hope", which he knew "solely sustains life", because "hope is the cover with which gods conceal the happiness that is in death".[78]

This definition of hope comes close to what Sarpi understood by opportunity. His willingness to wait for the right moment, or *occasione*, indicates a personality, which was composed of a peculiar mixture of cautiousness and a desire to act. As Micanzio put it, Sarpi's character was composed of "seclusiveness and politeness".[79] It seems that Micanzio shared these personality traits, since—it has been noted—while certain passages in his correspondence showed a Machiavellian belief in a 'virtu' capable of changing the course of action, others revealed how fully he submitted himself to the inscrutable ways of the divine providence.[80] Eager to find a way of combining own initiative with total dependence on God's will, Sarpi stressed the importance of waiting for the right moment: "I do as the artificer, who, when the time is unsuitable for his work, gathers material for the favourable occasion". He relied on the example set by Socrates, according to whom the only "worthwile science" was

77 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 30 March 1609, p. 179: "*anco il nostro essere è una leggierezza, et convien passarsi in riso il doverlo perdere*". For the letter, see Wootton 1983, pp. 128–131. Cfr. the aphorisms of Epicurus in a Vatican manuscript, published as an appendix in Diogenes Laërtios, *Merkittävien filosofien elämät ja opit*, translated by Marke Ahonen, Helsinki 2003, nos. 47 and 48, p. 417, where Epicurus urges his readers to be delighted at the moment of dying.

78 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 180: "*mi ritrovo cosí sacio della vita, che argomento esser tempo di lasciarla. Ho affatto abandonato tutte le speranze, et vego con esperienza, che esse sole sostentano la vita . . . Le speranze sono le coperte, con quale li Dei ascondono la felicità che è nella morte*".

79 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1396: "*ritiratezza et officiosità*".

80 Gabrieli 1957, p. 203.

"the science of opportunity".[81] Sarpi claimed that he had often seen things end in a manner quite different from what those around him might have expected, and this was why he preferred to "wait for the moment and not to make any prognosis".[82] The tendency to wait cautiously for the right opportunity and to make things as secure as possible was, according to Sarpi, typical of Italians who, however, often carried the principle to the extreme and therefore lost "many good occasions". This led Sarpi to conclude that there was a great need for "ardent persons", capable of inciting the "superfluous cautiousness" of Italians.[83]

In Venice such instigators could be found amongst the *giovani* who employed the concept of opportunity in their attempts to end the political passivity favoured by the *vecchi*.[84] Sarpi was impatient with the latter's submissiveness to the papacy and offered his writings as a contribution to the *giovani*'s programme for the political revival of the republic. Direct action might have been more efficient, but, for one reason or another, he deemed himself unable to engage in such efforts: "when virtuous men write, it is a clear sign that they cannot operate", he noted to Jean Hotman de Villiers in 1612.[85] Writing was undoubtedly the most natural way for him to participate in politics and by doing so he also took great risks, as the attempts on his life testify. Indeed, "without taking any risks", Sarpi asserted, "everything one does will be below average".[86] It should be remembered that the capacity to take risks and seize an opportunity was recognized as a crucial skill by many Renaissance writers, in particular by such shrewd minds as Machiavelli and Guicciardini. The first composed a poem titled "Of occasion" (*Dell'occasione*), in which he introduced two women, Occasion and Penitence, the first saying about the latter

81 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 45: "*fo come l'artefice, che nel tempo inetto all'opera sua, si fornisce di materia per l'opportunità*"; *ibid*., p. 86: "*la scienza dell'opportunità, disse Socrate, è sola degna e sola patrona*".

82 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 149: "*voglio aspettar l'evento e non pronosticar alcuna cosa*". See also, *ibid*. p. 135: "*quanto al pronosticarli il futuro, non ardisco, per l'esperienza ch'io ho della riuscita delle cose, sempre al contrario dell'espettazione*", and, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, p. 6, where Sarpi states that God often changes the human affairs to end up in the opposite way the men themselves have planned.

83 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 98: "*perdiamo molte buone occasioni . . . qualche persone veementi, che incitino un poco la nostra superflua cauzione*".

84 Bouwsma 1968, p. 277.

85 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 209: "*quando li valent'huomini scrivono, è manifesto indicio che non possono operare*".

86 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 124: "*senza l' arrischiarsi, tutto quel che si fa riesce di sotto del mediocre*".

that "she is the Penitence . . . and you should understand, that one who does not know how to seize me, gets her".[87] Guicciardini in turn warned against premature action:

> The same things that will work out easily and almost by themselves, when done at the right moment, not only fail when attempted too early, but they often also lose the easiness they would have had for a timely action. Thus, do not rush into things, or speed them up, but wait for the ripeness of them and for the right season.[88]

In terms of Sarpi's political career the interdict crisis overshadowed all the other opportunities. It was his long-awaited chance to rearrange the relations between temporal and ecclesiastical powers and to invalidate the temporal authority of the pope. These were the principal objectives of Sarpi's political activities. He was the first to acknowledge how important the interdict conflict was to him: "a man cannot do anything without an occasion", Sarpi wrote afterwards and concluded that "if there had not been the occasion of the interdict,

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87 Machiavelli, *Il teatro e tutti gli scritti letterari*, p. 325: "*Io son l'Occasione, a pochi nota . . . È Penitenzia: e però nota e intendi: chi non sa prender me, costei ritiene*". See also *Discourses*, p. 91.

88 Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, no. 78, p. 100: "*Le cose medesime che, tentate in tempo, sono facile a riuscire, anzi caggiono quasi per loro medesime, tentate innanzi al tempo, non solo non riescono allora, ma ti tolgono ancora spesso quella facilità che avevano di riuscire al tempo suo: però non correte furiosi alle cose, non le precipitate, aspettate la sua maturità, la sua stagione*". See also *ricordi* nos. 79 (*chi perde la occasione non la ritruova a sua posta*), 80 (*Felici veramente sono coloro a chi una medesima occasione torna più che una volta*), and 84, 145, 161, 178, 191, 198. The first (and incomplete) edition of Guicciardini's *Ricordi* was published in Paris in 1576 and other editions—in various languages—came out during the succeeding decades, but the first complete one was published only in the nineteenth century. Sarpi had at least some of the maximes in his own library (see, De Vivo 2006, p. 262; Masetti Zannini 1970, p. 194). Sarpi in fact reiterated the idea of the maxime no. 78 in a letter to Groslot de l'Isle (Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 19: "*potrebbe esser d'impedimento a quello che nei tempi futuri, fatto opportunamente, potesse partorir qualche buon effetto*"). Sarpi gave credit to Guicciardini's writings and was certainly familiar at least with his *Storia d'Italia* and the *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze* (Sarpi, *SG*, p. 228; Sarpi, *SS*, p. 531; Vivanti 1974, pp. xxix–xxxiv). Quaglia 1992, pp. 514–515, notes that there are certain similarities not just between Sarpi's history of the council of Trent and Guicciardini's history of Italy, but also between Sarpi's *Pensieri* and Guicciardini's *Ricordi*.

I would not have written anything".[89] He repeated this point in a letter to Jacques Gillot and claimed that he "would never have, if not out of compelling necessity, oriented" himself "in writing".[90] Opportunities, and especially the one generated by the interdict crisis, appeared to Sarpi as something destined and irresistible. Whatever was the role of Sarpi's own will and desire to see the papacy reformed and stripped of temporal authority, it nevertheless had to coincide with the opportunity provided by God:

> in everything the occasion is principal, and without it all things work out not only fruitlessly, but also at a loss. When God shows us an occasion, we have to believe that it is His will that we use it, and when He does not, that we wait in silence the moment of His permission.[91]

Sarpi resorted to God's inexplicable will whenever he failed to provide a rational explanation to a historical event. This is why Boris Ulianich has suggested that divine providence and history overlapped in Sarpi's concept of *occasione*.[92] Luigi Salvatorelli has also argued that Sarpi regarded opportunity as a religious phenomenon, as an irresistible gift from God. This notion gives us a fuller understanding of Sarpi's discontent with those Venetian patricians who tried to palliate the conflict between Venice and Rome: not only were these attempts at odds with Sarpi's political objectives, they also defied God's will, which was revealed through the opportunity to reform the papacy. However, Salvatorelli failed to recognize the political aspect of the crisis and insisted that the conflict was considered an exclusively religious matter both in Venice and Rome.[93] Even if Sarpi deemed every opportunity a sign from God, he was not blind to political motives and implications. He separated this world from the kingdom of God and recognized the interdict crisis as a political matter par excellence, while it was more expedient for the defenders of Rome to emphasize the religious dimension of the conflict. Despite making a clear separation between

89 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 130: "*Un uomo non può niente, senza l'occasione. Se l'occasione dell'interdetto non si fosse offerta, io non avrei scritto niente*".

90 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 154: "*neque ego unquam, nisi cogente necessitate, ad scribendum animum appulissem*".

91 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 149: "*in tutte le cose l'occasione è principale, e fuori di quella tutto si fa non solo infruttuosamente, ma anco con perdita. Quando Dio ci mostra l'opportunità, dobbiamo credere esser sua volontà che ci adoperiamo: quando no, che stiamo aspettando con silenzio il tempo del suo beneplacito*".

92 Ulianich 1979, pp. 186–187.

93 Salvatorelli 1953, pp. 314–315.

politics and religion, Sarpi's point of view merged the two in the sense that, according to him, political affairs were based on *occasione*, which was always provided by God as a token of His will.

That Sarpi considered God's will irresistible is reflected by the fact that he often quoted Seneca's fatalistic phrase "the faith guides the willing, drags the unwilling".[94] During the interdict crisis, for instance, Sarpi regarded himself as a humble instrument of God and merely followed his preordained destiny as an executor of divine will. In contrast to this, Paruta's early work brims with optimism and belief in human initiative or that which he referred to as "art". Paruta acknowledged that the "art" was helped by "fortune", which provided the opportunity to operate, but, ultimately, he believed fortune or opportunity did "not add any perfection to the produced action". Everything that issued from "art and virtue" was "free and certain", because it originated "from intellect" according to "certain and firm principles".[95] In comparison to Sarpi, Paruta placed less stress on opportunity as an integral part of any successful action. In keeping with his Aristotelian and humanistic view of politics and moral philosophy, Paruta emphasized man's own initiative and role in *vita activa*.[96] More akin to St. Augustine, Calvin and Neostoicism than to a humanistic reading of Aristotle's *zoon politikon*, Sarpi categorically rejected the idea of a self-sufficient man who found his fulfillment exclusively in civic activity. For him politicians were utterly dependent on divine grace and their actions were always determined by God's will, which was communicated to mankind through *occasione*.

According to Micanzio's biography Sarpi went further than any other philosopher in reflecting on the insignificance of man and, in fact, regarded

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94 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, to Francesco Castrino, 13 October 1609, p. 56: "*fata volentes ducunt, nolentes trahunt*". See also, *ibid*., vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 11 April 1617, p. 282: "la fatalità guida chi vuole, constringe chi ripugna"; and *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 14 September 1610, p. 92: "*fataque volentes ducere, et nolentes trahere*". Also Guicciardini quoted the same phrase in his *Ricordi*, no. 138, p. 165: "*Né e pazzi né e savî non possono finalmente resistere a quello che ha a essere: però io non lessi mai cosa che mi paressi meglio detta che quella che disse colui:* ducunt volentes fata, nolentes trahunt".

95 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, pp. 106–107: "*la fortuna . . . pare che concorra a tali operazioni, cioè in quanto ci presta l'occasione . . . ma tali cagioni non aggiungono alcuna perfezione all'operazioni prodotte . . . con verità potrassi affermare, quelle operazioni che nascono dall'arte e dalla virtù, essere operazioni libere e certe: libere, perchè traggono l'origine dall'intelletto . . . certe, perchè . . . d'altronde non dipendono che dagli stessi abiti, come da certi e fermi loro principii*".

96 Grendler 2002, p. 407 note 59. See also, Tuck 1979, p. 44.

himself as "nothing".[97] In his *De Auxiliis* Sarpi claimed that the idea of free will and the Pelagian concept of salvation grew from excessive self-esteem, "which makes us believe that we are something special".[98] In a similar vein, he concluded in his *pensieri* that "the most illustrious activity of Socrates was to know how to play with children".[99] How can we reconcile this sort of pessimism, self-degradation and renunciation of ambition with the fact that besides devising hundreds of *consulti* for the senate Sarpi also composed several weighty treatises on history and pressing political affairs? What kept him from retreating permanently to his monastery? Nothing suggests that he participated in *vita activa* out of civic duty or enthusiasm, as Paolo Paruta and other patricians clearly did. In Sarpi's case it was more exclusively a matter of performing his duty to God. It was fundamentally a religious, not civic or republican duty that inspired him, and the target of his political activity was the papacy, not Venice. It was God's will that the papacy be reformed and this task fell on the 'prince' of Venice, one of God's true ministers, while Sarpi himself was but a humble instrument at the disposal of the republic's government. At the same time, he was by no means free from ambition or the passions in general, but these emotions were transferred into a dedicated and obedient service to God and state. This was what he understood by duties of a good Christian and certainly his background as a mendicant friar encouraged acquiescence to his superiors. After all, being a Servite friar meant taking the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

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97 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1396: "*in tutto il corso del tempo ancora nissuno è arrivato forse al profondo della nichilità della natura umana* (*così mi sia lecito dire, perchè il padre così parlava*)*, stimandosi un niente*".

98 Sarpi *SS*, p. 160.

99 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, p. 628: "*La più illustre azzione di Socrate era saper giocar con li putti alli astragali*".

CHAPTER 5

Christian Mortalism

> De religione, non ratione, sed affectu iudicare . . . captivandam mentem in obsequium fidei.
>
> SARPI, *a letter to Isaac Casaubon, 22 June 1610*

(One judges religion not with reason, but with affection . . . one has to delude the mind to obey belief.)

Faith and Religion

Due to the enthusiastic work of Renaissance humanists many classical authors enjoyed a revival in the course of the sixteenth century. Whereas Plato was accepted as a philosopher who acknowledged the immortality of the soul, Aristotle was far more problematic with his notion of eternal world and his alleged theory of the soul's mortality. Pagan philosophers and poets such as Epicurus, Lucretius, Leucippus and Democritus were automatically rejected as impious and dangerous sources of heresy and atheism. During the Counter-Reformation period it became increasingly common to accuse dissidents of atheism, no matter how ill-justified such accusations truly were. In 1639 the Dutch Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) declared to his students that there were 'practical' and 'speculative' atheists, the first consisting of people who—like Epicureans, deists and libertines—considered religion useless; or practiced a wrong religion; or did not observe the rites and the ceremonies; or, like the Machiavellians and the politiques, did so merely on political grounds. 'Speculative' atheists in turn denied divine providence, downplayed the significance of the Bible, doubted natural light and the divine attributes, and rejected the idea of the resurrection of the body.[1] Later in the seventeenth century writers like Gottleib Spitzel, Anton Rieser and Gabriel Wedderkopf traced the origins of atheism to the infamous writings of figures such as Giromalo Cardano, Jacques Vallée, Pierre Charron, François Rabelais, Lucilio Vanini, Robert Fludd and Tommaso Campanella, in the notorious *De Tribus Impostoribus*, and in many clandestine manuscripts in circulation. Furthermore, Voetius and other such writers rallied against open-mindedness,

1 Allen 1964, pp. 7–9.

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the subordination of the church to the state, the diversity of sects, natural philosophers, and, finally, the satanic spreading of atheism. Voetius, the forerunner of these anti-secular writers, observed that atheism was especially popular in "democracies", which permitted "liberty of conscience".[2] Many of the aforesaid premises apply to Sarpi (he advocated the subordination of the church to the state, he was a natural philosopher, and he lived in an open-minded republic). Indeed, he was frequently prey to accusations of atheism, but I believe these allegations were based on political interests, not on facts.

Historians have offered a variety of interpretations of Sarpi's religiosity. According to Benedetto Croce, Sarpi's political writings contributed to the birth of a new religious conscience. Furthermore, Croce claimed that the way in which Sarpi stressed the limits of man was fundamentally religious. I fully agree that Sarpi's idea of the nature of man was Augustinian and shaped by his religious interpretation of man's weakness and dependence on divine grace. Gaetano Cozzi and Boris Ulianich have seen Sarpi as a sympathizer of Calvinism in their early studies. However, they have later diverged from this opinion: Cozzi came to view Sarpi as a complicated and tormented reformer, while Ulianich has recently rejected the Calvinian interpretation of Sarpi's views. In fact, Ulianich eschews ascribing to Sarpi any other religious position but that of a person who based his theology on the Scripture and especially on St. Paul. William Bouwsma's Sarpi was a philo-protestant whose religious ideas were nevertheless "consistent with Catholic orthodoxy", while Eric Cochrane described him as a typical representative of the Counter-Reformation period, in the sense that he was a deeply religious person. According to Manlio Busnelli Sarpi was undoubtedly a heterodox and apostate who was convinced of the utter corruption of Rome and who found religious truth in the Protestant doctrine. To Corrado Vivanti in turn Sarpi was a religious reformer who did not use religion as a political tool, but, instead, aspired towards an ecumenical church. Here Vivanti seems to have followed Luigi Salvatorelli's interpretation of Sarpi. Both Cozzi and Federico Chabod rejected any tinge of mysticism in Sarpi and Chabod noted that his religiosity was moral, sincere and profound. David Wootton, however, has quite strikingly suggested that Sarpi was an atheist, an argument subsequently accepted for example by A.P. Martinich, Richard Tuck, Paul A. Rahe—who goes as far as to claim that Sarpi was a "militant atheist"—and Gianluca Mori. Vittorio Frajese in turn sees Sarpi as a religious sceptic and a forerunner to Vico, Hegel, Feuerbach,

2 Allen 1964, pp. 11–12. Allen uses the word "democracies" without a reference to the original term.

Marx and Freud in the sense that Sarpi's theology was no longer a study of God, but, instead, anthropological science.[3]

Based on a thorough study of Sarpi's writings, I argue that he was a believer whose religiosity exceeded the limits of confessionalism and reached out for a religious universality, which was based on the principles of the early church. He did sympathize with Protestants (especially with Calvinists), but mainly because they advocated religious reform. Simplification of the Christian dogma, and, above all, a sweeping reform within the Catholic church must be seen as the foremost objectives of Sarpi's ecclesiastical policy. This can be judged for example from the way in which Sarpi referred to the *Consilium delectorum cardinalium de emendanda Ecclesia* (the assembly of nine cardinals and bishops summoned by Pope Paul III in order to enumerate all the abuses that needed to be reformed within the Church of Rome) in his history of the council of Trent. According to Sarpi the assembly listed "twenty-four abuses in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs and four in the specific government of Rome". He argued that the clergy's avarice and earthly aspirations defiled their spiritual duties, an argument, which clearly demonstrates that he longed for a reform. "The origin of all the abuses", he lamented, was to be found in the "readiness of the popes to pay heed to adulators and in the facility of revoking laws together with the lack of observance of Christ's commandment not to make profit out of spiritual matters".[4] The account of the assembly was, Sarpi remarked, "worth reading" and had it not been so lengthy, it would have "deserved to be registered word by word" in his history. Instead of copying the entire text, he contented himself with listing the individual abuses. He remarked that the pope wanted to keep the account in secrecy, although a copy of it was sent to Germany, where it was published and subsequently attacked by various writers who defended the Church of Rome. "However", Sarpi concluded dryly, "the number of Protestants increased in the same region".[5] All

3 Croce 1957, pp. 138, 153; Cozzi 1956, pp. 584, 593; for the change in Cozzi's interpretation, see Trebbi 2006, pp. 660–661; Ulianich 1956, pp. 432–435; Ulianich 2006, p. 86 and *passim*; Bouwsma 1968, pp. 528–529; *ibid.* 1962, p. 716; Cochrane 1981, p. 472; Busnelli 1986, pp. 193, 198, 202; Vivanti 1967, pp. 1082–1085; Salvatorelli, 1953 pp. 344, 350, 357; Chabod 1962, pp. 471–473, 519; Wootton 1983, pp. 3–5, 136–145; Martinich 1992, pp. 374 note 2; Tuck 1993, pp. 98–99; Rahe 1994, p. 14; Mori 2007, p. 264; Frajese 2006, pp. 179, 181.

4 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 141: "*Proposero nel principio, per fonte et origine di tutti gli abusi, la prontezza de' pontefici a dar orecchie alli adulatori e la facilità in derogare le leggi, con la inosservanza del commandamento di Cristo di non cavar guadagno delle cose spirituali*".

5 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 141: "*opera degna d'esser letta, che se la sua longhezza non avesse impedito, meritava esser registrata di parola in parola*"; p. 143: "*la copia mandata fu subito stampata e publicata per tutta Germania, e fu anco scritto contra di quella da diversi in lingua tedesca e latina. E pur tuttavia nella medesima regione cresceva il numero de' protestanti*".

this betrays Sarpi's sympathy for the Protestants and for a reform within the Church of Rome.

In the early seventeenth century any criticism directed against church authorities easily led to accusations of atheism. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, became the victim of such an accusation. This might be why he gave a definition for the grounds on which one could charge a man of atheism: "thus, only because of something he has said, either orally or in writing, can a man be accused of atheism; that is, if he has directly denied that God exists".[6] Neither Sarpi nor Hobbes explicitly denied the existence of God and, if we are to employ Hobbes' definition, neither one could justifiably be accused of atheism. The question of Hobbes' sincerity nevertheless continues to trouble scholars and, as we have seen, David Wootton's thesis on Sarpi's atheism has proven convincing to many Anglophone and Italian historians.[7] Both Sarpi and Hobbes were accused of atheism by their contemporaries. This was mainly due to the criticism, which they leveled against the papacy. Such criticism could not fail to provoke strong response, as is clear from the reactions to their writings. Defamation was a powerful political tool and in the early-seventeenth-century context this usually meant labeling political adversaries 'heretics' and 'atheists'. For example, pope Paul V declared that Sarpi's books were "replete with exorbitant heresies".[8] The Jesuit Hernando della Bastida in turn claimed that Sarpi's writings were "against Christ, his vicar, and all the other ministers of church" and as such worse than the works of "Luthers, Calvins, Peter Martyrs", and "copious of errors, brimming with maledictions, burdened with blasphemy, full of poison". Anyone who dared to follow Sarpi's teachings was bound to lose his "faith and Catholic religion" and could expect nothing but "misery and unhappiness" for his future.[9]

Sarpi's writings do not support the claim that he was an atheist. On many issues his position was that of a sceptic, but his scepticism should not be equated with atheism. In fact, from an atheistic point of view systematic scepticism can be seen as providing support for religious belief, because the

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6 Hobbes, *Appendix*, pp. 118–119: "*Dicto igitur aliquo, sive prolato sive scripto, reus fieri, neque ullo alio modo, potest; nempe, si directe negaverit Deum esse*".

7 For different interpretations of Hobbes' religiosity, see Forster 2003. Interestingly, Martinich 1992, pp. 1, 374 note 2, accepts Wootton's theory of Sarpi's atheism, but sees Hobbes as a "sincere, and relatively orthodox Christian".

8 I quote from Pin 2006b, p. 351: "*I libri di fra Paulo sono ripieni di essorbitanti eresie*".

9 Della Bastida, *Antidoto*, p. 3: "*infamatorio contro di Christo, del suo Vicario, & de gli altri Ministri della chiesa*"; p. 4: "*a petto a questo paiano men' mali l'opre, che al principio della loro perditione cavarono fuori I Lutheri, I Calvini, I Pietri martiri . . . si copioso d'errori, si colmo di maledicenze, si carico di bestemmie, si pieno di veleno*"; p. 188: "*perdere la fede, & Religione Cattolica . . . non gli resta altro che miseria, & infelicità*".

atheists' position postulates certain knowledge of God's inexistence. Atheism is based on the idea that truth and coherence are attainable and as such it conflicts with scepticism.[10] In this sense, the fact that Sarpi was a sceptic undermines any association of his position with atheism. In his case the fundamental question was not the existence of God, but whether knowledge of God was obtainable by reason or by faith. His response was unequivocal: he was convinced that knowledge of divine matters was attained *sola fide* and he explicitly claimed that in religious matters one could not make judgments based on reason, but, instead, they had to be based on affection or feeling. He concluded that this argument was followed by "all the wise men" and was in keeping with the requirement that "one has to delude the mind to obey belief".[11] This internalization of faith together with the adoption of *sola fide* principle were the root of Sarpi's criticism of clerical corruption and theological speculation. As Romano Amerio has pointed out Sarpi's thought was characterized by the "nothingness of man", the "incapability of reason", the "weakness of philosophy" and the "primariness of faith". Thus in Sarpi's view philosophical speculation about divine matters could only corrupt religion.[12]

In general, the doctrinal system of the Church of Rome faced a severe crisis as the reformed doctrines aroused the interest of intellectuals such as Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Gasparo Contarini and Sarpi. These new doctrines were considered attractive not only because of their theological contents, but also because of their anti-rational approach to religion. People like Sarpi were only too well aware of the great doctrinal pluralism of the later Middle Ages and the three major schisms within the Christian church, namely, the Hussite schism, that of Rome and Avignon, and the schism of the eastern and western church. This awareness partly explains the intensified need for a greater unity, simplicity and spirituality amongst many sixteenth-century religious thinkers. Sarpi's faith was internal and spiritual and, at least to a certain extent, this brought him close to such humanists who fought against intolerance.

Of the Florentine humanists Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) still tried to combine the best form of philosophy with the best form of religion, while Giovan Francesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533) adopted a more sceptical point

10 Kors 2002, pp. 60, 63.

11 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, to Casaubon, 22 June 1610, p. 218: "*de religione, non ratione, sed affectu iudicare . . . captivandam mentem in obsequium fidei*".

12 Amerio 1950, p. 12: "*nullità del uomo, incapacità della ragione, primalità della fede, debolezza della filosofia*".

of view. Pico turned away from Ficino's rationalist approach to religion and resorted, instead, to fideism and "anti-intellectualistic scepticism", as Delio Cantimori put it.[13] In line with Sarpi's and Pico's fideism cardinal Adriano Castellesi (1460–1521), to whom "true philosophy" consisted of the Scripture and the patristic texts, concluded that "one cannot comprehend spiritual matters by reason".[14] In Venice, Paolo Paruta referred to God as "the sun" and argued that "in order to see the sun, we should not look for other light than that of His own". He then concluded that to use "the light of science" in order to know God was little more than trying to see the sun with the light of a "small candle".[15]

Sarpi would have been happy to submit himself to "every better judgment", if the foundations of religious doctrines were but opinions, but "since they are matters of faith", he refused to pay heed to contrary ideas, even if they were presented by an "angel from the sky".[16] Faith had consequently the strength of a truth, while opinion, which resulted from a reasoning process, always left room for speculation. According to St. Aquinas man could not comprehend God "essentially" or "in his nature", because He exists outside the reach of our senses. Divine assistance was therefore a necessary prerequisite to any knowledge concerning God.[17] Given that Sarpi's epistemology was based on sense perception, it was only logical that he rejected the idea that men could understand divine matters with the help of reason alone: knowledge of the unperceivable God had to be founded on divine revelation. For Sarpi, when the knowledge of God was not based on divine revelation it was little more than superstition. Possibly following Lucretius (as suggested by Vittorio Frajese) Sarpi implied that the idea of God (or gods) was born out of man's fear of the unknown and natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning. According to Sarpi, the "first apprehension of divinity" was the "opinion of the insensible" that man forms of "operations of which the operator is not apparent". This first

13 Cantimori 1967, pp. 1, 5–7.

14 Cantimori 1967, pp. 7–8: "*Non posse spiritualia ratione probari*".

15 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 141: "*ma per vedere esso sole, altro lume non cerchiamo che il proprio di lui . . . l'usare il lume delle scienze a conoscere Iddio, altro non mi pare che volere co'l lume d'una picciola candela farci chiara la vista del sole*".

16 I quote from Ulianich 2006, p. 81: "*Se li fondamenti della dottrina . . . fussero materia di opinione, io doverei dire che della verità di essi me ne rimetto ad ogni meglior giudizio, ma perché sono materia di fede, e così ha predicato san Paulo, io debbe dire insieme con lui che se venisse un angelo dal cielo e portasse dottrina contraria questo sarebbe in disgrazia di Dio*".

17 Coleman 2000, pp. 99, 101.

idea of God was followed by "fear and cupidity".[18] This does not mean that in Sarpi's view God was nothing but imagination of frightened men. Instead, this *pensiero* should be read in the light of Sarpi's criticism of the rational approach to divine matters: mere reason resulted in opinion instead of faith and opinion in turn brought about passions such as fear and cupidity.

Sarpi was not particularly interested in theological doctrines, but neither did he consider them with indifference. He clearly accepted the theory of predestination, emphasized the pivotal role of divine grace for salvation, underlined the importance of faith, cherished the gospel, and sympathized with Christian principles such as charity, poverty, chastity and obedience. He frequently referred to St. Augustine and St. Paul, but his thought was also imbued with secular ancient philosophies. It has been argued that the Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic and Areian elements in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought should not be regarded simply as pro forma references to ancient sources, but, rather, they should be taken as references to philosophical and theological options found in the contemporary context. According to this argument the debates over Aristotelian, Epicurean and Stoic ideas were serious attempts to adapt or reject existing philosophical and theological alternatives. These ancient philosophies gave rise to complex theological problems as suggested for instance by the Epicurean concept of a distant and unprovidential deity, and the Stoic ideas of fatalistic determinism and material soul.[19] That Sarpi adopted these ideas is illustrative of the problematic and unorthodox nature of his religiosity. His religious ideas were based on the one hand on reformist ideals and on the other on ancient materialistic philosophies. Each of them encouraged him to make a strict distinction between the two kingdoms, the earthly and the heavenly, and to perceive the world through a separation between things material and immaterial.

Not surprisingly, Micanzio shared Sarpi's concept of the two separate worlds. While expressing his belief in the revival of Copernicus' forbidden *De revolutionibus*, he argued sarcastically that the book will gain a greater fortune in the future, precisely because it had been condemned by Rome "that hath found articles of faith also in mathematicall inventions".[20] Besides simply deriding the court of Rome, the distinction that Micanzio made between mathematics and articles of faith amounted to suggesting that religious convictions could

18 Frajese 1990, pp. 60, 66, 68–70; Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 643: "*E per l'operazioni de quali non gl'apparisce l'operante forma opinione dell insensibile, che è la prima apprensione di Divinità . . . prima di timore e cupidità*".

19 Muller 2003, vol. I, p. 68.

20 Micanzio, *Lettere*, letter of 28 December 1618, p. 80.

not be reached by reason, but by faith alone. In keeping with the basic assumption of fideism, both Sarpi and Micanzio distinguished between philosophy and faith.

The sixteenth-century scientific revolution had little impact on contemporary theology. At least Protestant theology seems to have remained largely intact and unaltered until the latter half of the seventeenth century. It has been argued that Protestant theologians were happy "with the late Renaissance revisions of Christian Aristotelianism at the hands of Roman Catholic philosophers like Zabarella and Suárez and of Protestant thinkers like Ramus and Burgersdijk".[21] Correspondingly, Sarpi's natural philosophy does not seem to have had any influence on his religious thought. As a scientist he aspired for new and better understanding of natural phenomena, but as a theologian he advocated a return to the discipline of the early church. In his opinion it was only the earthly sphere that was under human control, while an understanding of heavenly matters always depended on divine assistance. This fed Sarpi's religious tolerance, which allowed him to associate with foreign Calvinists and Huguenots as well as with Jews living in Venice. Vittorio Frajese has pointed out that Sarpi's *consulti* reveal a constant defence not only of the Jewish minority, but of all the religious minorities present in Venice.[22] Sarpi's aversion towards religious controversies is shown for example in his letter to Jean Hotman de Villiers (1552–1636), a Huguenot and former counsellor to Henry IV. In the letter Sarpi disapproved of a dispute that had emerged over the ideas of the reformed theologian Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622) and argued that the controversy had brought about nothing good and it would have been "more appropriate to invent a manner to extinguish many old" disputes than to "incite new ones".[23] In the following year (1613) Sarpi commented on the controversy between Daniel Tilenus and Pierre du Moulin (the former was an Arminian and the latter a fervent antagonist of Arminians), and here too Sarpi expressed his fear of the possible consequences of the clash. He would have rather seen Tilenus unanswered and "left to debate with himself", because "the heat vanishes when there is no fuel and antiperistalsis".[24]

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21 Muller 2003, vol. I, p. 71.

22 Frajese 2006, pp. 164–165.

23 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 17 August 1612, p. 206: "*La disputa de Vorstio . . . non faranno gran bene. Sarebbe più a proposito inventar maniera di estinguer molte delle vecchie che di eccitarne de nuove*".

24 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 29 January 1613, pp. 262–263: "*desidererei più tosto che non li fosse risposto ed egli fosse lasciato dibatter da sé solo . . . Svanisce il calore, quando è senza fomento e senza antiperistasi*".

Sarpi seems to have believed that the lack of theological precision was conducive to religious toleration. The same can be said of Jean Bodin's *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*, in which there are seven discussants who all represent a different creed or philosophical point of view. When Senamus (the sceptic) wonders why "jews, Christians, Ismaelites, Swiss, Romans and Germans" disagree on so many things, but agree completely on the Psalms of David, Salomon (the Jew) replies with a definition of true religion:

> This ought not to seem strange, since all those people acknowledge that they worship the name and the divinity of one eternal God, and they confess there is one God alone. Moreover, the praises of David . . . say nothing about Venus and Bacchus, nothing about Jesus of Nazareth, nothing about Mohammed or the Virgin Mary, nothing about the countless myriads of saints which Christians had chosen . . . However, they remind us of the praises and acts of one eternal Builder of all things.[25]

It was this Hebraic, transcendent God with no name, that seems to best correspond to the God of the Heptaplomers. Toralba (the natural philosopher) confirmed that the religion of Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methusaleh and Noah was the best, and "those who have departed from that most ancient and best religion have fallen into an irreconcilable labyrinth of errors".[26] This pure and simple religion with one indescribable God was flexible enough to embrace all believers. Bodin's book suggested that too precise definitions of God along with the great number of prophets and saints gave birth to religious factionalism and, ultimately, civil strife.

Sarpi's concept of the best possible religion resembled the one described in the *Heptaplomeres* in the sense that both emphasized the importance of avoiding too precise a description of God. According to Sarpi the best religion offered "no definition at all of the divine being", nor did it describe religious services in too explicit a manner. Furthermore, it promoted religious tolerance, because it did "not abhor any opinion" or "service" that others had or practiced.[27] Fundamentally, both Sarpi and the *Heptaplomeres* were either critical of or indifferent to religious rites and ceremonies, but accepted them as a means to guarantee the successful reception of religion. For each of them,

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25 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, pp. 323–324.

26 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 183.

27 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 656: "*Non fa determinazione alcuna dell'esser divino. Né gran prescrizzione nel modo di servirlo. Non aborrisce nessuna opinione che gl'altri abbino. Né alcun servizio che gl'altri prestino*".

the simplicity of service and the indefiniteness of God not only enabled religious tolerance, they also facilitated the universality of the best religion. Sarpi detected this sort of simplicity in the early church and, in a similar vein, in *Heptaplomeres* it was associated with the "most ancient religion". No doubt that Sarpi would have agreed with Toralba's conclusion that "the best religion is the oldest . . . new religions, new sacrifices, new sacraments, new rites, new laws, new methods, new churches, new degrees, new customs have completely disrupted some of the most prosperous states".[28]

Early Church

What was it that made Sarpi so critical of the Church of Rome? In order to answer this question, it is crucial to understand Sarpi's position in the wider context of sixteenth-century religious and political discourse. To begin with, Luigi Salvatorelli distinguished four tenets which Sarpi shared with sixteenth-century Protestants: 1) that the Christian Church was degenerate; 2) that the popes had usurped their power; 3) that there was no constitutional difference between the clergy and the laity within the church; 4) and, finally, that the Sacred Scripture was the supreme authority in religious matters. As Salvatorelli pointed out, however, each of these claims was older than the Protestant Reformation, which makes it difficult to identify Sarpi's objectives with those of Luther or Calvin, for instance. Sarpi was certainly a reformist, but his enduring Catholicism and lack of interest in conversion distinguished him from the Protestant reformers. Nowhere in his writings Sarpi does consider—even fleetingly—converting to a new creed. He was not interested in proselytizing and even though he did show keen interest in the activities of the French Huguenots and clearly sympathized with them, he was not particularly eager to see France convert to Calvinism. In Salvatorelli's view, Sarpi believed that a strong Huguenot front in France would have been an important counterforce against Rome, Spain, and the Jesuits. Theologically speaking, however, he remained indifferent as regards whether France was Catholic or Calvinist.[29]

Sarpi was categorically opposed to any kind of a change in an established political system, which was likely to happen were there to occur a change in religion. Therefore, any religious reform accepted by Sarpi had to be moderate and based on an existing creed, which in the context of early-modern Venice meant Catholicism. Sarpi's objectives were in practice closer to Catholic than

28 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 173.

29 Salvatorelli 1953, pp. 338–339.

Protestant Reformation in that he refused to encourage conversion in Venice. This is also reflected by the fact that he commended popes Marcellus II (9 April 1555–1 May 1555) and Hadrian VI (1522–1523), because they had acknowledged the need for a reform within the Church of Rome.[30] Similarly, while in Rome Sarpi became well acquainted with cardinal Giovanni Battista Castagna and had high expectations for reform when Castagna became Urban VII and one of the key figures in the Catholic reform movement, although these hopes were quelled by the pope's untimely death shortly after his election.[31] The fact that Sarpi esteemed these popes for the support they expressed for a reform within the Church of Rome suggests that he did not necessarily expect the reform to take place without the consent, participation and even initiative of the pope. Theoretically speaking, Sarpi shared such Protestant tenets as the rejection of the pope's temporal authority, acknowledgment of faith as the key to salvation and acceptance of the Scripture as the sole basis of guidance. On a more pragmatic level, however, he never questioned the necessity of preserving Venice as a Catholic republic. To call for Protestant Reformation in Italy would have meant too a great peril for the religious and political status quo in Venice and elsewhere. Despite the Protestant sympathies that Sarpi frequently expressed in his letters to Francesco Castrino and Jérôme Groslot de l'Isle (at times going as far as expressing his hopes for the arrival of the Gospel in Italy, even if this were to entail war[32]), his reformist objectives remained typically cautious. Micanzio however seems to have envisaged a military league of numerous Protestant states led by James I and did not hesitate to express his disappointment in the King of England when this failed to become reality.[33] While Micanzio audaciously revealed his sympathies for Protestant reform in Italy (his sermons, for instance, openly promoted the Gospel), Sarpi limited his expression of Protestant sympathies to his correspondence and private conversations with figures such as William Bedell, ambassador Wotton's chaplain.

One way of trying to reform the Catholic church without advocating the problematic idea of converting Venice to Protestantism was to advance the revival of the early church. With this in mind Sarpi wrote to Leschassier that "it is amazing to which degree knowledge of the ancient ecclesiastical

30 Ulianich 1979, p. 193.

31 Cozzi 1969, p. 18. Cozzi argued that in Rome Castagna was the 'closest' person to Sarpi.

32 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, to Castrino, 8 June 1610, p. 87: "*se v'é speranza che li riformati acquistino maggior vantaggio nella causa di religione: perché io qui miro sopra ogni altra cosa, persuaso che questo servirebbe a far entrare l'Evangelio in Italia*". For Sarpi's approval of war, see also, Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, pp. 120, 231, 248; vol. II, pp. 81, 82.

33 Gabrieli 1957, pp. 218, 223.

discipline would benefit the public tranquility".[34] It is worth noting that instead of underlining the religious and spiritual truthfulness of the early church, Sarpi simply referred to it as a discipline, a set of rules, which would lead to something good already in this life. This point of view emphasized civic obedience instead of theological orthodoxy as the guideline for Christians' behavior in a community. In Sarpi's view there was no need for the complex theological system of sin and absolution, a system created by the medieval church and upheld by the contemporary Church of Rome. It was enough, he believed, to follow the teachings of Church Fathers such as St. Paul and to realize—in line with the Protestant point of view—that man did good works automatically, because God had made him just.

Sarpi judged contemporary theology a mere travesty of the ancient discipline. Although "we study everything in the writings and doctrines of the ancients", Sarpi wrote to Leschassier, "we have changed the meaning of all the words" in the course of time. Sarpi identified 'pope', 'cardinal', 'deacon', 'church', 'catholic', 'heretic' and 'martyr' as examples of words, which used to have different meaning during the early church. Everything had become distorted, he concluded, and "when we proclaim that we publish works of the ancients, we introduce those of our own".[35] With these changes language itself became increasingly complicated and artificial. New meanings served new and premeditated political purposes, which, when performed by members of the clergy, amounted to abuse of power. In temporal affairs Sarpi was keen to advocate principles of secrecy and reason of state, but his ideal church was transparent, simple, and void of power. Sarpi identified effective rule with clandestineness, which explains his worry about the clergy's potential to use confession boxes in order to advance their political objectives. He advocated the revival of the early church and urged for the replacement of the corrupt church organization with a nonpolitical "congregation of believers", which was not an exclusive gathering of the clergy, but also included lay members.[36]

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34 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 27 May 1608, p. 15: "*Mirum quantum antiquae ecclesiasticae disciplinae cognitio tranquillitati publicae prodesset*".

35 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 14 September 1610, p. 93: "*Omnia examinamus ex veterum scriptis ac doctrina, verum significationem omnium vocum illis usitatarum mutavimus . . . papa, cardinalis, diaconus, ecclesia, catholicus, haereticus, martyr . . . Omnia pervertimus, et dum antiquorum monumenta producere profitemur, nostra proferimus*".

36 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 137: "*Nunc ecclesiam accipio pro fidelium convocatio, non vero pro clericis solis*". See also, Ulianich 1961, pp. xciii, xcv; Cozzi 1979, p. 88; Bouwsma 1968, p. 541.

This, he wished, would have promoted equality between laity and clergy by depriving the latter of its unduly influential status.

Sarpi approved of Casaubon's criticism of those who "destroy all the traces of the ancients", although, at the same time, he was convinced that everything that "has been established by God has remained, remains, and will remain".[37] In other words, the very core of religion did not change, even if man altered the meaning of words and thereby 'destroyed' what had been established by the Church Fathers and the first few general councils. Somewhere underneath the increasing body of theological doctrines existed the immutable foundation of religion as it was laid by God. Contemporary theology distorted these original, simple principles often for political reasons, which is why Sarpi praised Casaubon for "opposing those who by force try to fit the (church) fathers into their own opinions".[38] As far as Sarpi's own writings were concerned, he claimed to be faithful to the Bible and the Church Fathers. When touching on religion, he frequently asserted that he drew on orthodox tradition. "Everything I have written", he claimed, "I have taken from the sacred Scripture, from the sacred canons and the saint ancient doctors, and modern too, all approved of by the saint mother church".[39]

Many of Sarpi's contemporaries expressed doubts about his religious orthodoxy. For example the English travel writer Thomas Coryat (1577–1617) observed that "it is thought that he (Sarpi) doth dissent in many points from the Papistical doctrine, and inclineth to the Protestants religion, by reason that some learned Protestants have by their conversation with him in his convent something directed him from Popery". As soon as the Venetian senators learned about this, Coryat continued, they "restrained" Sarpi "from all conference with Protestants".[40] However, the senate's decision to sanction Sarpi from conversations with Protestants did not issue from Sarpi's allegedly unorthodox religious views, it was instead a general rule that any Venetian who worked for the government was forbidden to converse with foreigners without a special permit from the senate.[41]

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37 Sarpi, *Opere*, 17 August 1610, p. 289: "*Approvo . . . che tu disapprovi quelli che distruggono tutte le tracce degli antichi . . . E rimase, rimane e rimarrà ciò che è stato stabilito da Dio*".

38 Sarpi, *Opere*, 17 August 1610, p. 289: "*Ti lodo in quanto avversi quelli che per forza cercano di trarre i padri al loro parere*".

39 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 446: "*tutto quello che ho scritto l'ho cavato dalla Sacra Scrittura, dalli sacri canoni e dottori santi antichi, et altri moderni, tutti appruovati dalla santa madre chiesa*"; See also, Ulianich 2006, pp. 76–78.

40 Lievsay 1973, p. 25.

41 Wootton 1983, p. 98.

As Corrado Pin has pointed out, Sarpi never indentified what he understood by the 'true church' with the Church of Rome, towards which he showed persistent and systematic distrust.[42] Neither did he identify the 'true church' with any other established religious community. Rather, he advocated an apostolic creed in order to reform the Catholic church and to advance religious peace and unanimity within Christendom. It was for this reason that he extolled the early church in his letters and leveled such acrid criticism at the Church of Rome in his histories and other public writings. Sarpi was not alone in pointing out and criticizing the church's gradual estrangement from apostolic simplicity. It was in fact very common for the Calvinists to aspire towards an ideal universal church based on apostolic principles, which was then expected to put an end to the great variety of different creeds.[43] For example Isaac Casaubon, himself a Swiss Calvinist, discussed the nature of the early church in his correspondence with Sarpi. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that it was the Calvinists who inspired Sarpi to praise the early church as the paragon of ecclesiastical order, since such eulogy had already been expressed by many Catholic reformers throughout the Middle Ages. Dissidents like Sarpi had long contrasted the contemporary system with the purity and impeccability of the early church in order to highlight the defects and problems present in their own church.[44]

While Sarpi clearly sympathized with the Protestants' point of view as regards the importance of faith and the Scripture (as opposed to the Catholic emphasis on clerical absolution and papal authority), Salvatorelli's argument that the key to Sarpi's philoprotestantism is in his anti-papism seems to ignore broader aspects of his thought. It was not simply anti-papism that defined Sarpi's position, it was, instead, anti-dogmatism and profound sense of relativism that made him immune to doctrinal controversies in the first place, and, in addition to this, a longing for a more spiritual, pure and untarnished religious cult, which made him appreciate the Protestant interpretation of salvation and ecclesiastical authority. I nevertheless agree with Salvatorelli when he argues that instead of limiting himself to choosing between Protestantism and Catholicism, Sarpi aspired towards such objectivity, which would have eventually reformed the entire 'Church of God'.[45] This is reflected by Sarpi's refusal to identify his ideal church with any particular church. He even excluded the church of France, which he openly admired, and preferred to talk

42 Pin 2006b, p. 349.

43 Cozzi 1979, p. 19.

44 Chabod 1962, p. 518.

45 Salvatorelli 1953, p. 351.

about the universal rather than the Gallican church.[46] His ideal church was the one he referred to as a "congregation of believers", a spiritual, abstract and universal church, which acknowledged no strict hierarchy between its lay and clerical members.

Salvatorelli noted that the advocates of the Gallican church based their ideas on legal and national considerations, while Sarpi's point of departure was religious and catholic (in the sense of 'universal'). However, Salvatorelli continued, Sarpi and the Gallicans arrived to same conclusions at least as far as acknowledging the universality of the church was concerned.[47] The fact that Salvatorelli rejected the idea that Sarpi may also have had legal or national interests was in line with his somewhat narrow interpretation of Sarpi as a strictly religious character who had no political interests at all. In my opinion, however, Sarpi's programme was primarily political and aimed to check clergy's temporal authority by emphasizing the church's essentially spiritual nature. To this end, Sarpi advocated apostolic discipline, which made no distinction between concepts 'saint' and 'Christian', or 'pope' and 'bishop'. In his *Trattato delle materie beneficiarie* Sarpi argued that in the apostolic era all believers still aspired for "perfect saintliness" and words such as "saint" and "blessed" signified a Christian regardless of the person's position in the church hierarchy. However, concurrently with the lower clergy's increasing involvement in temporal affairs, these epithets became used to refer exclusively to bishops, until they too took a more conspicuous role in public life. At this point, 'saint' and 'blessed' became exclusively papal epithets and while they had originally been signs of "goodness", they were now used as tokens of "greatness". As far as "the title of the pope" was concerned, Sarpi remarked that during the early church it was given to every bishop.[48]

Sarpi's defence of temporal authority was not limited to the rejection of the idea that members of the clergy had power in temporal affairs. Indeed, he went as far as arguing that temporal rulers had the right to interfere in church government. To this end, he argued that in the early church "all believers

46 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 22 June 1608, p. 23: "*le libertà della chiesa, io non voglio dire gallicana, ma universale*".

47 Salvatorelli 1953, p. 351.

48 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 366: "*anticamente il nome di santo e santissimo, beato e beatissimo, era commune a tutti li fedeli di Cristo, quando tutti ancora aspiravano alla perfetta santità . . . li secolari attessero molto più del conveniente alle cose mondane, questi nomi restarono all'ordine clericale, e doppo la declinazione delli chierici inferiori, restò ai soli vescovi . . . restò al romano, solamente; il quale li ha poi ritenuti non come titoli di bontà, sì come erano, ma come titoli di grandezza . . . il nome di papa . . . si dava ad ogni vescovo*".

participated in the spiritual government" and "pious Christian princes" who were "principal members of the church" made "many laws" and "judged over many cases", which pertained to "pure ecclesiastical government".[49] There were other writers too who eagerly denied temporal power to clergy while they asserted the secular rulers' authority in church matters. This was often done by resorting to the example of the early church. Jacques Leschassier, for example, remarked how the "old Catholic church . . . honoured and obeyed its emperors".[50] According to writers such as Sarpi and Leschassier the order of the church government had become distorted in the sense that what used to be an egalitarian system including both priestly and lay members was now the pinnacle of monarchical hierarchy run exclusively by the clergy. "The famous and venerable name of the church", Sarpi wrote, used to be "common to all believers in the ancient times", including "both clergy and laity", but now it was "for the most part restricted to signify the clergy only".[51] On the other hand, this sort of 'vulgarization' of the church authority was condemned for example by Tommaso Campanella who claimed that Calvinists undermined clergy's "dignity" by advocating everyman's priesthood.[52]

In Sarpi's view, the revival of the early church was impossible as long as the high prelates of Rome maintained their authority and refused to interpret theology according to the *sola scriptura* principle, the principle which placed all theological authority in the Scripture. "I totally agree", Sarpi wrote to Leschassier in December 1607, with your claim that the "discipline of the early church" could be fully extracted from the "writings of the apostles" and the "canons of the councils". However, in Italy it was impossible to refer exclusively to "divine Paul" without corroborating the apostle's opinion with a reference

49 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 481: "*si come già a tutti li fideli toccava parte di questo governo spirituale, così li principi cristiani pii, come membri principali della chiesa, hanno fatto molte legi, giudicate molte cause spettanti al puro governo ecclesiastico*".

50 Leschassier, *Consulta*, p. 19: "*la vecchia Chiesa Catolica, la quale honorava, & obediva i suoi Imperatori*". Emery 1924, p. 328, pointed out that the way the Gallicans understood spiritual power was similar to that of the Augsburg confession in that they considered ecclesiastical power exclusively ministerial by nature. Furthermore, they rejected the idea that the church could exist outside or above the state, but, instead, argued that the church was an integral member of the state. All this was in line with Sarpi's view of ecclesiastical matters.

51 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 195: "*il famoso e augusto nome di chiesa, che era commune a tutti li fedeli anticamente, così clerici che laici, adesso pare che sia ristretto per lo più a significar li clerici solamente*". Sarpi makes the same point in, *Tridentino*, vol. I, pp. 232–235.

52 Campanella, *Parole universali della dottrina politica*, p. 126: "*Il sacerdotio non si deve fare volgare, perche perde la dignità . . . calviniani, che si stimano tutti essere sacerdoti*".

to such a writer which the church authorities called a "classic doctor": whoever failed to do this was likely to become labeled a heretic.[53] This remark has an obvious affinity with Luther's notion of *sola scriptura* and thus links Sarpi to the Protestant Reformation's general preference for the Bible over scholastic theology. Sarpi found support for this principle and for his ecclesiological views from Gallicans such as Leschassier who claimed that the freedom of the church was based on "apostolic principles, ancient customs of the church, and statutes of the fathers". Furthermore, the early church councils had for centuries constituted the "foundation" of the church's "belief" and "discipline", but "ever since the earthly grandeur entered the church", the decrees of the early councils and the *codex Gallicanorum canonum*, which originally established the freedom of the Gallican church, had been systematically undermined by those who introduced novelties in doctrines and ecclesiastical government.[54] Both Sarpi and Leschassier ascribed the responsibility to protect the church from corruption to temporal rulers. This protection became necessary after the ancient liberty of the universal church had been "suffocated" and the "Gallican Church fell in a miserable servitude", because of the churchmen's appetite for "earthly grandeur" and because a "code of Roman canons" was gradually compiled "in order to oppose it to the code of the universal church".[55]

Sarpi argued that the first church councils "counseled" and "resolved" matters correctly, since they were "presided" by Christ and the Holy Spirit. He also noted that in these councils human passions, ceremonies and "prescribed formulations" were overcome by charity, one of the fundamental principles

53 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 5: "*Maxime probo* (*vir excellentissime*) *quod asseris scriptis apostolicis et canonibus conciliorum posse ad plenum antiquam ecclesiasticam disciplinam repraesentari, verum nos eo loci sumus, ubi divum Paulum nudum at solum allegare absque doctoris alicuius, ut aiunt, classici confirmatione, pro haeresis praeiudicio habeatur*".

54 Leschassier, *De La Liberté*, p. 3: "*ceste liberté consiste au droit Apostolique, coustume ancienne de l'Eglise & statuts des peres*"; p. 4: "*de ces counciles* (early councils) *. . . l'Eglise en touse siecles a fait le fondament de sa foy & de sa discipline*"; p. 5: "*Depuis que la grandeur du monde est entrée en l'Eglise, l'authorité de ces deux codes* (the decrees of the early councils and the *codex Gallicanorum canonum*) *. . . a esté affoiblie a Rome*".

55 Leschassier, *De La Liberté*, pp. 1–2: "*ceste seconde liberté* (the royal protection of the church) *a esté introduicte par necessité . . . Car apres que la premiere* (the ancient freedom of the church constituted by the code of the universal church) *a esté suffoquee & que l'Eglise Gallicane est tombee en la miserable servitude*"; p. 6: "*Ce code canonique Romain fut peu a peu compilé pour l'opposer au code de l'Eglise universelle*". For Sarpi's view on the matter, see the discussion on two kingdoms in chapter 6.

of Christianity.[56] In keeping with the early-Christian charity's immunity to mundane motivations Sarpi ignored earthly "reputation" and, in line with St. Paul's teachings, advocated the "rules of charity", which override everything else, including the rules of "human prudence and wisdom", while they "sympathize with and cede to everyone".[57] While charity was considered divine and superior to all human wisdom, by emphasizing the relevance of charity to the apostolic era writers like Sarpi very effectively strengthened the image of the early church as the most holy and pure congregation of believers. To people like Sarpi and Leschassier the gradual waning of the rules of charity and the introduction of the "code of Roman canons" revealed an inevitable decay of the Christian church. "We have turned the whole world upside down", Sarpi complained, "because we have not believed the truth that the law of charity is superior to all the others".[58]

The early church had many admirers among Sarpi's contemporaries: the former archbishop of Spoleto Marc'Antonio de Dominis (1560–1624)—who defended Venice during the interdict and fled to England in 1616—stressed the importance of the first four general councils and eventually based his religious views on them and apostolicity. He claimed that Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and the Greek religion were nothing but different aspects of the same faith.[59] According to Leschassier the first four general councils formed the "principal liberty of the church" and, it has been argued, even Hobbes based his religious ideas on the first four ecclesiastical councils and the creed of the Apostles.[60] Sarpi's, Micanzio's, Leschassier's, Casaubon's and De Dominis' praise for the early church took place long after the first waves of

56 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 232: "*presedendo Cristo e lo Spirito Santo, nè avendo luogo gli affetti umani ma la carità, senza ceremonie nè formule prescritte consegliavano e risolvevano quanto occorreva*".

57 I quote from Ulianich 2006, p. 93: "*e non aver mire mondane di riputazione, ma governarsi con le regole della carità, che calpestando tutte le altre, eziandio quelle della prudenza e sapienza umana, compatisce e cede ad ognuno*".

58 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Jean Hotman de Villiers, 14 April 1609, p. 183: "*Habbiamo tutto il mondo conturbato, per non esser creduta questa verità, che la legge della carità è superiore a tutte le altre*".

59 Benzoni 1970, p. 105.

60 Leschassier, *De La Liberté*, pp. 9–10: "*la principale liberté de l'Eglise est dans le droit des quatre premiers Conciles oecumeniques & autres que ceux-la confirment*". For Hobbes' admiration for the early church, see Martinich 1992, p. 2. However, Forster 2003, pp. 193–194, argues that Hobbes' simplification of the Anglican creed raises suspicions about the sincerity of his religiosity, because his theology "appears to have been specifically tailored to stay within the church law".

the Reformation and humanism in Europe, both of which promoted a return to the original sources of knowledge. That the principle '*ad fontes*' still inspired erudites such as Sarpi is hardly surprising, nor is the fact that in his case the humanistic quest for original sources manifested itself through reformist objectives. His approach to religion was more akin to the religious spirituality of humanists and refomers than to the rationalistic and dogmatic theology advocated by medieval scholasticism. However, in this he may have been influenced by Ockham just as much as by the humanists and reformers of sixteenth and fifteenth centuries: Charles Trinkaus has argued that the Ockhamist approach to religion replaced "rational theology" with an "intuitive approach to God in a renewed theology of revelation and faith, if not a down-right fideism."[61] This was an aspiration common not only to Sarpi and Micanzio, but to Luther and Calvin, and to humanists such as Petrarch and Coluccio Salutati.[62]

Salvation, Grace and Predestination

For a theologian Sarpi was strikingly averse to speculating about theological questions. Indeed, he was convinced that "mortal" men could talk about divine things only "with a stammer".[63] He remarked that many of the doctrinal differences between Protestants and Catholics existed merely on verbal level and disputes over these variations only made him laugh.[64] In "matters of belief", he argued, "the best expression is the simpliest one."[65] There were already too many religious doctrines and, Sarpi argued, by creating new ones in an attempt to resolve certain biblical ambiguities theologians only distorted things which had not been explained and which should have been left unexplained.[66] Furthermore, he insisted that theological doctrines were often

61 Trinkaus 1974, p. 345.

62 Trinkaus 1974, pp. 349–352, 358.

63 Sarpi, *Opere*, a letter to Dudley Carleton, p. 719: "*Delle cose divine ogni mortale parlerà sempre balbutendo*".

64 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 7 July 1609, p. 86: "*Io tengo che molte differenze siino pure verbali, e mi eccitano alle volte a ridere*". Also, in *Tridentino*, vol. I, pp. 84–85, Sarpi claimed that Luther's and Zwingli's dispute over the Eucharist resulted from mere verbal confusion. He then concluded that all verbal debates tended to become obstinate problems due to the very "tenuity of the difference": "*come avviene in tutte le questioni verbali, la tenuità della differenza è fomento dell'ostinazione*".

65 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 377: "*lo poteva pur dire chiaramente, come conviene in materia di fede, dove la miglior espressione è la più semplice*".

66 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 17 February 1609, p. 65.

used for political purposes and he was particularly upset by the "theologizing" performed by the advocates of the Church of Rome who only aimed to disarrange "both the kingdom of God and those of the world".[67] In a similar vein, the English poet John Donne (1572–1631) criticized the council of Trent for producing new articles of faith. According to him the "doctrine of inducing new articles of faith is hereticall", because religious doctrines were like stars in that both were "created at once, with one *Fiat*" and while stars could not "beget new stars", to produce new doctrines was to create a "new creed, not conceived before by the holy Ghost in the Scriptures". Therefore, by creating new doctrines the council of Trent in fact produced a new creed, "monstruous", because it contained "more articles than the old creed of the Apostles did".[68] No doubt that Sarpi shared Donne's point of view. Despite his general distaste for doctrinal controversies and theological speculation, however, he did comment on such theological problems as salvation, grace and predestination in some of his writings. His views on these matters corresponded to his political goal to check the clergy's authority in temporal matters. Not surprisingly, Sarpi's theological and political views differed from the traditional position of the Church of Rome and found their most natural allies amongst the champions of the Reformation.

In contrast to the orthodox Catholic point of view—which rejected the Protestant *sola fide* doctrine (justification by faith alone) and emphasized the significance of good works—Sarpi maintained that salvation depended exclusively on divine grace. This does not mean, however, that he had converted to Protestantism. Rather, he simply minimized the role of human works in the economy of salvation by insisting on God's omnipotence and by denying man any power over his own salvation. This position was closer to the Protestant than the Catholic doctrine on the matter, but vague enough to exclude Sarpi from more elaborate theological debates of the period. Indeed, the centrality of divine grace to Sarpi's thought allowed him to rise above the contemporary religious disputes and to embrace a more spiritual form of worship, one exercised during the early church and advocated by Church Fathers such as St. Paul and St. Augustine. His ecclesiology too was founded on the concept of grace, as we can judge from his claim that "the church of God cannot exist" without the "cognition" of grace, "its not human, but divine, foundation".[69]

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67 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 64: "*Quanto però bisogna guardarsi dal teologizzare in questo modo, col quale si disforma e si disordina e il regno di Dio e quelli del mondo*".

68 Johnson 2003, pp. 95–96.

69 I quote from Ulianich 2006, p. 82: "*senza la cognizione di quest'articolo non può star la Chiesa di Dio; questo è il suo fondamento non umano, ma divino*".

As Boris Ulianich has observed, Sarpi's theological views can be summarized as follows: both his ecclesiology and soteriology were based on grace; the church was the kingdom of grace and did not stand on human deeds; human wisdom could not replace the word of God or divine grace; it was not possible to hypothesize a real, politicized and terrestrial church, which would have been governed by human reason; and finally, ecclesiology was not an autonomous part of theology, but permeated with soteriology, i.e. salvation theory.[70] Sarpi's insistence on the key importance and indispensability of grace shows an affinity with Reformation theology, which considered saints, indulgencies and good works ineffectual in the economy of salvation, and, instead, argued that salvation depended solely on faith and God's grace. It should be stressed, however, that this affinity was based on Sarpi's admiration for the early church and on his desire to reform the Church of Rome rather than on his adoption of, say, Luther's or Calvin's creed.

By the end of 1604 Ippolito Massarini, a Servite friar and a member of the Congregatio de Auxiliis, asked Sarpi to write a brief treatise on the controversy over divine grace that had been evolving between the Domenicans and the Jesuits since the early 1580s.[71] Sarpi's response (*De Auxiliis*) left little doubt about his position in the controversy. He began by declaring that "it is a fundamental article of Christian belief, that man needs divine grace, that is, divine help, in order to obtain salvation", and then added that not everyone will be saved, however, but only "the few chosen ones".[72] After a forceful start Sarpi moved on to discuss the Pelagian and Semipelagian ideas of grace, which he refuted by resorting to St. Augustine and St. Paul, his favourite Church Fathers.[73] According to these church authorities, Sarpi pointed out, man required grace not only in order "to do good" works, but also in order to want to do them. God also helped man to execute good works and to maintain the "good will" that generated such action.[74] In Sarpi's view, then, good works did not antecede

70 Ulianich 2006, pp. 82–83.

71 According to Da Pozzo 1968, pp. 127–128, Sarpi wrote *De Auxiliis* "soon after 1604", after having been commissioned by Massarini; Lucchesini 1825, p. 232, pointed out that Massarini died in December 1604.

72 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 157: "*È articulo fondamentale della fede cristiana che l'uomo ha bisogno della divina grazia, cioè del divino agiutto, per ottener la salute. È ancora certo che . . . molti sono chiamati, e pochi elletti*". In Corrado Pin's edition *De Auxiliis* is the *consulto* number 72, pp. 840–854.

73 In general, for Sarpi's Augustinianism, see Bouwsma 1968, pp. 528, 576, and for his admiration for St. Paul, see Ulianich 2006, *passim*.

74 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 158: "*non solamente abbiamo bisogno della grazia di Dio per operar bene, ma anco per voler operare . . . ci fa perseverare nella buona volontà*".

God's grace, but on the contrary they happened as a result of grace. While this view was perfectly in keeping with Protestant theology, it questioned the Catholic belief in the meritoriousness of good works.

In his *De Auxiliis* Sarpi rejected the "Catholic doctors" who had examined the origins of the sufficiency and the efficiency of divine help and concluded that the former originated from grace and the latter from the free will of man. In Sarpi's view these doctors measured the mysteries of faith according to human wisdom as opposed to that of the Bible (*dottrina rivelata da Dio*), which only proved that they were not particularly proficient in the Scriptures. Moreover, they argued that the Scripture contained moral "precepts" (*precetti di ben operare*) and threatened wrongdoers with castigation. In their opinion all these precepts would have been communicated to mankind in vain, were it not totally in man's power to decide whether he accepted or refused divine grace. Sarpi rejected this argument and, instead, adopted St. Augustine's interpretation of precepts of God as information about the duties of man, duties, which he was nevertheless unable to accomplish without divine help. Respectively, he posited that the castigations only showed the limitations of man, caused by his sins.[75] Here too Sarpi's position was in keeping with that of Protestant Reformers who, first of all, renounced the scholastic synthesis of theology and philosophy and by so doing questioned the role of human wisdom in divine matters. Furthermore, Sarpi's interpretation of God's moral law as a manifestation of man's duties and limitations, and his Augustinian rejection of man's capability to follow the law without help from divine grace, reflected the Protestant view on the matter.[76]

The question of God's moral law and its implementation in human affairs bears on the problem of free will. This was discussed in an illuminating manner in Jean Bodin's *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, where Salomon, the Jewish discussant, argued that the law would have been given in vain and "the promise of divine rewards would be empty" if "man has no power, nor even will, to follow divine laws". The Calvinist Curtius countered that "we act good or bad not from will, but from necessity, nor has anyone ever had any power or free

75 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 159–160: "*S. Agostino sapientissimamente dechiara che . . . dalli precetti che Dio dà a tutti, si ha da concludere quello che ognun è debitore di fare, ma non può far senza la grazia divina; e dalle reprensioni si conclude quello che all'uomo manca, ma per sua colpa, essendosi redutto in tal stato per peccato*".

76 For the Protestant Reformation's dismissal of human wisdom and insistence on grace, see, for example, Bouwsma 1990, pp. 229, 234; Bouwsma 1975, pp. 37–39. For the Protestant interpretation of God's moral law, see Cameron 1991, pp. 115–116.

will".[77] Salomon's position was in line with that of the "Catholic doctors" whom Sarpi rejected in his *De Auxiliis*, whereas Curtius' stance resembled Sarpi's own point of view. In fact, Coronaeus, the Catholic host of the seven discussants, claimed that Curtius was left alone with the Stoics, while all the other philosophers agreed with the Roman church and the Hebrews.[78] Bodin thus pointed out that Calvinistic predestination coincided with the natural determinism of the Stoics, both being hostile towards the idea of free will. Sarpi would have no doubt joined Curtius and the Stoics in their advocacy of predestination and determinism and, as we will see, in their rejection of the freedom of the will.

In line with his general depreciation of human potential Sarpi attacked the "Catholic doctors" for ascribing too much autonomy and aptitude to man. That divine grace became efficacious only when accepted by men upon their own free will was in Sarpi's view "something that Christian ears cannot hear", because this would have meant that it was human reason—not God—that defined good and evil. This doctrine, Sarpi claimed, issued from excessive self-esteem and from the idea that whatever applied to human affairs on earth could also be applied to "supernatural" matters.[79] Furthermore, the claim that man had the power to turn grace efficacious and to influence his own salvation was in his view little more than a trick that the clergy used in order to manipulate common people by alienating them from God and by making them increasingly "dependent on men". This, Sarpi concluded, "serves political reasons".[80] The gradual politicization of religion was not only the leitmotif of his *Trattato delle materie beneficiarie* and *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino*, but also, in a wider context, one of the problems that gave rise to reformist movements in sixteenth-century Europe.[81] It is worth repeating, however, that in spite of the obvious similarities between Sarpi's theological views and those of, say, Luther and Calvin, Sarpi was not a Protestant, but a Catholic reformer. The similarities between Sarpi and the Protestants issued from their corresponding interpretations of certain key readings and points of reference, which included

77 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 414.

78 Bodin, *Heptaplomeres*, p. 418.

79 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 160: "*la efficacia, quale è il principale, venirebbe dall'uomo; e potrebbe riconoscere altrettanto da sé quanto da Dio il suo bene; cosa che le orecchie cristiane non possono udire . . . Questa sentenza ha gran fomento dall'eccessivo amore di noi medesimi . . . e dal vedere che così operiamo nelle cose umane, cavando per analogia che l'istesso debbia avvenire nelle sopranaturali*".

80 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 160: "*perché questa lontana più da Dio e mette qualche dependenza dagl'uomini, che serve alle raggioni politiche*".

81 Corrado Pin—for example—observes in Sarpi, *Consulti*, p. 849, note 16, how frequently Sarpi criticized the politicization of religion in his history of the council of Trent.

in the first place the Bible, St. Augustine and St. Paul. It is crucial to acknowledge that often the differences between Protestant and Catholic reformers were minimal. These affinities were also the result of the irenic objectives underlying the religio-political views of those thinkers, Protestant or Catholic, who emphasized the significance of the early church, for example. According to this line of thought religious rites and theological doctrines were to be kept as simple as possible, because this reduced the contrast and impact of confessional differences. At the same time, the simplification of rites and doctrines resulted in an enhanced sense of spirituality as this left less room for the politicization of religion.

Not surprisingly, Sarpi's *De Auxiliis* rejected the Jesuits' point of view and agreed with the Domenicans who regarded the precepts of God as sufficient grace. This would have been enough to save people, were they not corrupted by sin. Since they were sinful, however, additional help was needed and came in the form of divine motion, which turned the will from its evil inclination and guided it towards good. Furthermore, Sarpi argued that this motion consisted of a physical action inside our will, it was not violent, and thus it was not repugnant to free will. It would have been against the freedom of the will, if the will was moved by an external cause, Sarpi specified, but when it was moved by itself or by God, the movement was free.[82] Elsewhere Sarpi touched on the relation between divine motion and the freedom of the will: "St. Thomas said well, that nothing, which is moved by its cause, is moved violently; and if men were moved by God, their works would be voluntary".[83] This interpretation of the freedom of the will as divine motion in man did not contradict Sarpi's adherence to natural determinism and Calvinistic predestination theory. In fact, Sarpi's rejection of the Jesuit point of view—which was most famously formulated by the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600), and which postulated the idea of God's intermediate knowledge, *scientia media*, according to which there were such future contingencies which God knew, but which happened independently of his will and out of the free will of man[84]—was based on his insistence on God's omnipotence and on his acceptance of the idea of predestination. Sarpi's submission of the freedom of the will to the will of God

82 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 163: "*Sarebbe contro il libero arbitrio, se alcuna causa esterior alla volontà la movesse; ma quando la volontà muove se stessa o veramente è mossa da Dio che è più interno alla volontà che essa stessa, il moto è libero*".

83 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 141, p. 154: "*Ben disse adunque S. Tommaso, che niuna cosa mossa dalla sua causa è violentemente mossa; e se gli uomini fosser mossi da Dio, le opere loro volontarie sarebbero*".

84 Ponzio 2008, pp. 487–488.

was, once again, an idea that placed him closer to St. Augustine and Protestant thinkers than to the Catholic doctrine expressed and advocated by the Jesuits. That Sarpi did not write about the freedom of the will in greater detail should not surprise us: his position suggests that he considered the question closely related to divine affairs and therefore inaccessible to human reason. In his opinion, salvation depended entirely on God's mysterious will and it was impossible to know why some were saved and others were not. According to Sarpi there was no such freedom of the will, or voluntary action, which would have had influence on man's own salvation. He summarized his understanding of human freedom at the end of the *De Auxiliis* by quoting St. Augustine: "we do not acquire divine grace by our freedom, but by divine grace we achieve freedom".[85]

Vittorio Frajese has pointed out three things that justify Sarpi's choice of position here: firstly, his aversion to the Jesuits led him to side with their opponents, the Dominicans; secondly, his view reflected that of the patricians most closely connected to him; thirdly, the position chosen by Sarpi—that salvation depended entirely on God's grace—advanced his political objective to restrict the authority of the clergy.[86] As far as the first and the third point are concerned, it is my view that Frajese might exaggerate the impact of Sarpi's political programme on his idea of salvation and, true to his interpretation of Sarpi as a religious sceptic, ignores the possibility that Sarpi may have had sincere religious views. The second point—that Sarpi simply repeated what certain Venetian patricians thought about the matter—is difficult to establish, as is suggested by the fact that here Frajese refers only to Nicolò Contarini's treatise *De perfectione rerum*. To me it seems, however, that Contarini diverged from Sarpi's point of view in that he laid greater stress on man's own role in the economy of salvation. Indeed, Contarini believed in the freedom of the will and claimed that it distinguished man from the "brutes".[87] In the chapter on predestination he claimed that God "has elected us so" that "we have to look for and work vehemently in order to acquire beatitude", although God supports us by giving us the power to "somehow elect ourselves", so that "should you not be predestined, you would become one".[88] Not only was there a clear

85 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 163–164: "*non per nostra libertà acquistiamo la grazia divina, ma per grazia divina conseguiamo la libertà*".

86 Frajese 1994, p. 213.

87 Contarini, *De perfectione rerum*, p. 345: "*liberum arbitrium est voluntatis facultas eligendi . . . in quo vel maximè a brutis seiungimur*".

88 Contarini, *De perfectione rerum*, p. 363: "*Deus namque ita nos elegit . . . nobis quoque vehementer videndum laborandumque esse pro beatitate assequenda . . . potestatem etiam*

difference between Sarpi and Contarini as far as their ideas about freedom, grace and salvation were concerned, but there also was a considerable distance in time between *De perfectione rerum* and *De Auxiliis*: the first was published in 1578, while Sarpi wrote his treatise nearly thirty years later. Even if his *De Auxiliis* would have reflected the theological views of Venetian patricians, Contarini's *De perfectione rerum* is hardly the source material to confirm this. I believe, therefore, that *De Auxiliis* was a sincere expression of Sarpi's own theological position.

But how did divine help manifest itself to mankind? According to Sarpi this happened in two ways, which he referred to as internal and external "correction". The first stood for divine grace, which helped man to refrain from sin. It provided man not only with the understanding of right and wrong, but also with a will to do that what was recognized as right and to avoid that what was understood to be wrong. The 'external correction' in turn meant "fraternal charity", a "burden" (or a duty) to look after one another by admonishing and reprimanding those neighbours who had sinned.[89] This did not imply any sort of positive human influence on salvation, but, simply, that divine grace worked on the elect first internally and then indirectly and externally, which made the elect express the love and "fraternal charity" that he felt for his neighbour, not out of particular will and aim to save the neighbour, but simply out of love. This was in keeping with Aquinas' definition of charity as the "spiritual life of the soul", consisting "principally in love of God, and secondarily in love of neighbour". Aquinas himself based his concept of charity on that of St. Paul, according to whom charity derived from God and "is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us".[90] What Sarpi meant by the 'external correction' was an attitude rather than a means to influence God's plan for salvation, and that attitude itself derived from God.

In addition to *De Auxiliis* Sarpi made an important theological statement in a letter to the Dutch classical scholar Daniel Heinsius (1580–1655). He wrote the letter on 4 June 1620, that is, in the year following the conclusion of the synod of Dortrecht, which put an end to the controversy over Arminianism. The winning side of the so-called Gomarists (named after their leader Franciscus Gomarus) adhered to a strict interpretation of the Calvinistic idea

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dederit, nos ipsos aliqua ratione in eundem finem eligendi . . . Si non es praedestinatus, praedestineris".

89 Sarpi, *Consulti*, no. 9, p. 351: "*oltre la correzione interiore, Cristo Nostro Signore ha instituito una esteriore, dove per la carità fraterna ciascuno, tenendo cura del prossimo, avesse carico di ammonirlo e reprenderlo quando falla*".

90 Aquinas, *Political writings*, pp. 192, 214–215.

of predestination, whereas the Arminians held a more lenient view. In accordance with the Gomarist interpretation, the synod confirmed that the efficient help of Christ's death touched only the elect, that grace was irresistible, and, that it was impossible for the elect to lose their faith. Both Sarpi and Heinsius sided with the Gomarists. Heinsius emphasized the oneness of election and grace and the irresistibility of the latter in his *Homilia in locum Johannis Cap. XVII vers. IX* (1619), which Sarpi had read shortly after its publication.[91] In the letter Sarpi expressed his support for Heinsius:

> that was without any doubt the opinion of the Apostles John and Paul, what you have related in your *Homilia*, and only those, who have been damned by the blindness of their mind, do not believe it to be orthodox, namely, that only the elect are included in divine grace and adoption.[92]

In his *Homilia* Heinsius often paraphrased the decrees of Dortrecht, which in turn were in harmony with the Calvinist theory of predestination.[93] The theological affinities between Sarpi and Heinsius might suggest that Sarpi was a Calvinist, an argument already put forward by scholars like Cozzi, Ulianich and Salvatorelli.[94] Cozzi and Ulianich have nevertheless pointed out that Sarpi's letter to Heinsius might have been a mere expression of his political thought: it is possible that he took sides with Heinsius and the Gomarists simply because the Arminians were likely to sympathize with Spain.[95] It is worth mentioning that Heinsius was criticized of being "exceedingly inconstant in the business of religion, turning first to one party and then to another . . . according to the point to which the wind of prosperity happened to veer about".[96] This suggests that Heinsius based his stance on political insight, which, had Sarpi also considered Heinsius a politician, might give further evidence for the view

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91 Ulianich 1956, pp. 433, 437.

92 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, p. 223: "*Fuit procul dubio Apostolorum Johannis et Pauli sententia, quam in tua* Homilia *narrasti, eamque orthodoxam esse soli non credunt qui caecitate mentis damnati sunt; nam, ut divinae gratiae et adoptionis soli electi participes sunt*".

93 Ulianich 1956, pp. 432–435.

94 Cozzi 1956, pp. 584, 593; Ulianich 1956, p. 438; Salvatorelli 1953, pp. 359–360, according to whom Sarpi's God philosophically resembled the God of the Stoics, but religiously that of Calvin. Ulianich 2006, however, renounces his previous Calvinistic interpretation of Sarpi's religious thought.

95 Cozzi 1969, p. 707; Ulianich 1958, p. 399.

96 Arminius, *The Works*, vol. I, p. 49. See also p. 50 for Sarpi's appreciation for Heinsius' *Homilia*.

that Sarpi's letter to Heinsius was politically motivated. This does not, however, challenge the fact that Sarpi embraced the theory of predestination, as writings such as *De Auxiliis* clearly confirm.

Mortality of the Soul

The very concept of an immortal and immaterial soul derives from Greek philosophy, especially from Plato, which of course preceded the Jewish and the Christian interpretations of the soul. In the early sixteenth century Luther had his doubts about the immortality of the soul on religious grounds, while Pomponazzi approached the problem from a philosophical point of view. Towards the end of the century and in particular during the first decades of the following century the traditional Christian view of the soul as something immaterial, intellective, and immortal was challenged by new materialistic interpretations inspired by the philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus. Writers such as Pierre Gassendi and the prolific Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo struggled to reconcile these materialistic ideas with some of the basic principles of Christian faith. Hobbes in turn combined the theological and the philosophical aspects and concluded that the Christian understanding of eternal life did not entail the natural immortality of the soul. He arrived at this conclusion some time between *De Cive* (1642), where he merely noted that the problem was incomprehensible to reason, and *Leviathan* (1651), where he already denied the natural immortality of the soul.[97]

Despite Sarpi's low opinion of his own philosophical writings (which he later became to consider as representing foolish immaturity[98]), his *pensieri* nevertheless demonstrate that he was troubled by the nature of the immaterial and, more significantly, that he was influenced by ancient materialistic philosophies. His interest in scholastic philosophy and its naturalistic tendencies, his sympathy for the Reformation theology, and his materialistic understanding of natural phenomena accompanied with a keen interest in the thought of such ancient philosophers as Democritus and Epicurus, repeatedly exposed him to the idea of natural mortality of the soul, or, at least, reinforced his belief that things related to afterlife were matters of faith, not of rational thinking. At the same time, he was surrounded by and worked for Venetian patricians who unequivocally claimed that the soul was immortal in the sense that a part of it was eternal and, allegedly, independent from the body. However, Sarpi

97 Wright 2006, pp. 224–225. For Quevedo, see Krill 1988, p. 383.

98 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1304.

never referred to the soul as something eternal or immortal, on the contrary, he explicitly questioned this view in his *Arte di ben pensare*. At the same time, nothing suggests that he was an atheist or that he questioned the basic principles of the Christian creed. This leaves us with the claim that he was a Christian who believed in the soul's mortality.

The Church of Rome's interpretation of the soul's immortality faced challenges other than those of materialistic philosophies. For example, many Church Fathers and sixteenth-century reformers associated the idea of immortality with arrogance and immodesty. Furthermore, as Eusebius noted in his *Church History*, there were Arabs who held the mortalist view.[99] Sarpi was no doubt familiar with what the Church Fathers wrote on the question of the soul's mortality and he certainly shared the humble attitude of the reformers, as we can judge from his claim that the best religions "put God in the highest position, since it gives more hope", and "man in the lowest position, because it restrains more the passions".[100]

Norman Burns has identified different branches amongst those thinkers who believed in the soul's natural mortality. There was a milder form of mortalism, according to which the soul did not really die, but fell in a sleep-like unconscious state, from which it was awakened by God. Luther endorsed this kind of a mortalism, while Calvin argued that "when we say that the spirit of man is immortal, we do not affirm that it can stand against the hand of God, or subsist without his agency". Calvin too questioned man's natural immortality when he exhorted the reader to remain humble before God and, to this purpose, quoted the Church Father Irenaeus: "let us learn by experience that we have endurance for eternity through his goodness, and not from our nature".[101] While champions of the milder form of mortalism (so-called soul sleepers) believed that both the body and the personal soul would be resurrected into immortality on the judgment day, the radical mortalists, the so-called annihilationists, denied the resurrection of the body and claimed that the human personality—as it manifests itself in the soul—dissolved with body, so that only the divine and impersonal essence in the soul was unified with God, and, consequently, elevated into immortality.[102]

Micanzio offers a useful point of orientation in terms of Sarpi's view on the soul's mortality. When Micanzio commented on Marc'Antonio de Dominis'

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99 Burns 1972, p. 12.

100 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 654: "*Le megliori mettono Dio al più alto, che dà maggior speranza. L'uomo al più basso, che rafrena più gl'affetti*".

101 Burns 1972, pp. 12, 27–30.

102 Burns 1972, pp. 13–14, 35.

concept of the three "estates" of the soul (the present life, the temporary 'sleep' without body after death, and the resurrection and reunion with the body in a state of perfect happiness) he admitted that many "ancient Fathers" endorsed the idea of the intermediary state of the soul, only to conclude that their opinion "will hardly endure our interpretations".[103] Thus by denying the sleep of the soul Micanzio postulated the death of the soul, which suggests that he was an annihilationist, a radical mortalist. P.O. Kristeller's observation that the idea of an immortal soul derived from certain Church Fathers and not from the Bible at least partly explains Micanzio's critique of the Church Father's interpretation of the soul's mortality. According to Micanzio, the Bible contained everything that was "necessary to a Christian".[104]

It is also useful to analyze Thomas Hobbes' point of view, since his natural philosophy was remarkably similar to that of Sarpi. Hobbes rejected the creationistic view, according to which God created every individual soul from nothing.[105] This suggests that he may have accepted the idea of the soul's transmission from the parents to the child, which was, incidentally, also the opinion of John Milton, another Englishman that has been classified as a Christian mortalist.[106] This so-called traducianism entailed that the soul—having been born with the body—also died with it. However, Hobbes seems to have gone further than the traducians, since he did not really distinguish between corporeal and incorporeal matter. According to him everything in the universe was corporeal, and "spirits . . . are therefore really bodies". This explained how the soul could go "to heaven, hell, or purgatory", since "motion is change of place, and incorporeall substances are not capable of place".[107]

Sarpi too claimed that the incorporeal was not capable of moving, but, unlike Hobbes, maintained that intelligence, for instance, was incorporeal. He examined the relation between the material and the immaterial in his *pensieri* and posed the question how something corporeal could ever be in contact with something incorporeal. According to him the "knowing" or the one who knows "does many things by knowledge without realizing the (act of) knowing", and this becomes evident in the "movement of muscles, which undoubtedly are

103 Micanzio, *Lettere*, letter of 1 December 1618, pp. 89–90.

104 Kristeller 1979, pp. 185–186; Micanzio is quoted in Rein 1904, p. 218: "*La scrittura contiene abondamente quello, che è necessario ad un Christiano*".

105 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 46, p. 695.

106 Burns 1972, p. 172.

107 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 46, pp. 689, 693.

moved by knowledge, and (yet) nobody knows it".[108] There was physical action, therefore, which seemed to be performed automatically, although in reality it was set in motion by commands of the mind. But how was a command of the mind changed into physical action? It was clear that the body consisted of matter and form and was capable of moving. The "incorporeal", instead, "has no matter, and neither a form", which is why "it cannot move". If, however, there are two motions, "one from a body and the other from the incorporeal", they have to be comparable with one another, because a comparison is not possible "between things which have no common matter". Sarpi then concluded that "the intellect is incorporeal" and does not move.[109] Here Sarpi seems to be reflecting on Aristotle's argument that the soul moves the body "through some kind of choice and thought process", instead of the body being pulled into motion by never-resting "spherical atoms", as Democritus had reasoned.[110] Aristotle's point of view was repeated by Aquinas who argued that "a body can be touched by an incorporeal thing, which moves the body".[111] In front of this claim Sarpi could only note that while it was evident that a body was finite and capable of moving or being moved, the incorporeal was infinite and therefore immobile. In theory, only parts of infinity could move or be moved, but "how can it be divided?" Sarpi asked, and "who determines with which part it is to move?"[112] In the end, Sarpi could not explain how an infinite and incorporeal thing could ever move itself or make finite and corporeal things move.

In general, Sarpi's thoughts about motion and matter remained tentative and as such they reflect the bafflement of a Christian thinker who was drawn to materialistic philosophies. His natural philosophy provided a materialistic explanation for motion, but acknowledged the existence of something purely incorporeal—the intellect—in the universe. For Sarpi, the question of how the corporeal and the incorporeal could overlap or have influence on one another remained insoluble. While Hobbes' natural philosophy postulated a thoroughly materialistic functioning of the universe and abandoned the

108 Sarpi, *Arte*, in *Pensieri*, p. 585: "*Ma che il conoscente faccia molte cose per cognizione senza . . . saper di conoscere . . . apparisce nel moto de' muscoli, che senza dubbio sono mossi dalla cognizione, e niuno lo sa*".

109 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 501, pp. 368–369: "*L'incorporeo non ha materia, e però né men forma, dunque non può muovere . . . quando due moti si facciano, l'uno da corpo l'altro da incorporeo, devon esser comparabili . . . non cade peraltro comparazione tra le cose che la materia comune non hanno . . . l'intelletto è incorporeo, e intendendo non si muove*".

110 Aristotle, *De Anima*, bk. I, chap. III, p. 140.

111 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 75, article 1, vol. 1, p. 379.

112 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 401, p. 304: "*la virtù incorporea . . . dovrà esser infinita . . . come è partibile? E poi chi determina con quanta parte abbia ella da muovere?*".

Christian paradigm, which explained phenomena through the workings of the holy ghost or the inexplicable will of God, Sarpi repeatedly referred to the latter and acknowledged the existence of the incorporeal. It was because of this acknowledgment that Sarpi's natural philosophy remained compatible with Christianity.

We should bear in mind that Sarpi wrote most of his *pensieri* between 1578 and the 1590s, that is to say, before he became influenced by Galileo and the theories of the new science. On the other hand, already in the first decades of the century Pietro Pomponazzi had undermined the autonomy of the human will with his naturalistic and deterministic philosophy, which judged it impossible to detach the human mind from the body. Pomponazzi's main argument was in fact that the soul was dependent on the body, in particular in matters related to cognitive activities. This implied that the soul died with the body. At least publicly, however, Pomponazzi denied the immortality of the soul only on philosophical grounds, not as an article of faith, and it has been argued that Pomponazzi was more rationalistic than medieval 'radicals' such as Ockham.[113] Sarpi admired Ockham and possessed at least Pomponazzi's *De intensione et remissione*, which testifies to his familiarity with the naturalistic tradition that run from Ockham to Pomponazzi, and to Cesare Cremonini, the Paduan philosopher who also numbered amongst those thinkers who were accused of having denied the immortality of the soul.[114] Sarpi was certainly influenced by the intellectual traditions of the University of Padua, but we should also remember that his early teacher Giovanni Maria Capella based his theological views on the philosophy of Duns Scotus who had argued that the traditional arguments for the soul's immortality were weak and thus the belief in resurrection of the soul had to be based on faith alone.[115] As such, constructing Sarpi's notion of the immortality of the soul requires that we pay due attention to the scholastic and Christian influence on his thought. This was no doubt far deeper than the impact that the scientific revolution had on him. Therefore, I believe that it would be a mistake to regard Sarpi simply as a scientific, materialistic and atheistic advocate of the soul's mortality. He was, in my view, a Christian mortalist whose understanding of natural phenomena was materialistic and clearly influenced by the new science and Galileo's notions about physics and motion. At the same time, Sarpi never renounced his religious identity of a Servite friar.

113 Pine 1986, pp. 14–15.

114 Masetti Zannini 1970, p. 197; Kristeller 1979, pp. 192–193; Schmitt 1960.

115 Kristeller 1979, p. 186.

It was nonetheless the case that some contemporaries accused Sarpi of denying the immortality of the soul and by so doing intimated that he had lost his religious belief. According to the Jesuit Antonio Possevino, for example, Sarpi and some Venetian patricians belonged to an academy where "the idea of the mortality of the soul" was sustained "in the Aristotelian way".[116] Certainly, the question may have been discussed as a philosophical problem, but, in general, the attitude of Venetian patricians was deeply religious and a conversation about Aristotle's views on mortality did not turn anyone into an atheist. For example, Pietro Duodo, a patrician with a keen interest in natural sciences and a friend of Galileo's, asserted in his overtly Aristotelian book that the soul had two distinct parts: "one eternal, the other mortal". Stefano Tiepolo in turn observed that both Plato and Aristotle agreed on the immortality of the rational soul. Last but not least, Nicolò Contarini unambiguously rejected the idea of the mortality of the soul: "thus, our souls are divine and they are not obliterated by death", because that "what does not depend on matter . . . is immortal". He specified that the soul clearly did not depend on matter and was therefore immortal and concluded that "one cannot deduce anything clearer or more certain" than this.[117] These were hardly men who believed in the mortality of the soul, as Possevino claimed. It would have been difficult for Sarpi to challenge their point of view, which is why he expressed his belief in the natural mortality of the soul only in his private writings.

In one such private text, the *Arte di ben pensare*, Sarpi included the immortality of the soul amongst the false ideas held by men. He criticized men for self-conceit and claimed that man "thinks he is so perfect that it would be a great pity if he died", which is why the dead "does not separate the sense from himself".[118] What does this mean? First of all, the reference to 'sense', which the dead was still supposed to have, means the capacity of sensing things. Earlier

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116 Possevino, *Risposta*, p. 5: "*un'Academia, nella quale alquanti nobili . . . più volte si trovarono, introducendo . . . l'opinione della mortalità dell'anima per via d'Aristotele*". For this and other similar accusations, see Cozzi 1969, p. 22; Wootton 1983, p. 41; Frajese 1994, pp. 90–94; Frajese 2006, pp. 179–180. Benzoni 1977, p. 103, has suggested that Possevino referred to *ridotto* Morosini.

117 Duodo, *Peripateticorum*, p. 54: "*una aeterna, altera mortalis*"; Tiepolo, *Academicarum*, p. 147: "*Convenit Arist. cum Platone in eo, quod ambo asserunt solam animam rationalem esse aeternam*"; Contarini, *De perfectione rerum,* p. 310: "*Divini itaque nostri sunt animi, neque morte delentur*", p. 314: "*Quod a materia non pendet . . . immortale est. Animi ut sint, a materia non pendet. Animi igitur sunt immortales. Hoc nihil clarius, aut certius concludi potest*".

118 Sarpi, *Arte*, in *Pensieri*, p. 596: "*gli sembra d'essere tanto perfetto, che gran peccato sarebbe se morisse, per lo che morto ancora non separa da sé il senso*".

in the same text Sarpi discussed the formation of the act of sensing and argued that "the operation, which the sensible does in the instrument, is not enough for sensing, since (otherwise) also the dead would sense".[119] What was needed, besides the sense organs, was the virtue of "sensory faculty" (*facoltà sensitiva*), which was evidently something a dead person no longer had and was related to the cognitive faculties or the soul. What Sarpi claimed here was that men had such a high opinion of themselves that they hated the idea of dying, but since it was inevitable, they consoled themselves with the belief that the act of sensing continued after death. He then argued that "when one hears how a dead person becomes praised, an emulation and desire to get that praise breaks out in him".[120] However, the dead could not hear these praises, because the body had lost the *facoltà sensitiva*, a faculty, which could be understood as a part of the soul. Sarpi did not explicitly specify whether the soul was dead too or whether it had departed from the body and continued its living elsewhere.

It is difficult to say whether Sarpi understood the human soul as something which consisted of more than one part, of which one could be immortal, while the other(s) died with the body. What we know is that he assumed the existence of a *facoltà sensitiva*, without which any act of sensing was impossible. At this point, it might be useful to take a brief look at some of the traditional theories about the nature of the soul. According to William of Ockham, for example, man was partly material and partly spiritual, so that he was composed of a corporeal form and two different kinds of souls, one sensory and the other intellectual. Here Ockham was in line with the majority of late medieval thinkers, since to argue that the different parts of the soul (vegetative, sensory and rational, as Aristotle defined them) would have composed only one single form, would have been a controversial theological claim. If, then, the vegetative and sensory parts ceased to exist in the process of dying, it was necessary to distinguish between them and the other part of the soul, namely the part, which would be immortal. Thomas Aquinas held that the body and the soul shared—in their mutual relationship—the same act of existing and formed one single being. However, he also posited that the soul had its own

119 Sarpi, *Arte*, in *Pensieri*, p. 578: "*Non basta però a sentire l'operazione che fa il sensibile nell'instromento, perché sentirebbono ancor i morti*".

120 Sarpi, *Arte*, in *Pensieri*, p. 596: "*e perché, sentendo lodare qualche morto, gli nasce emulazione e desiderio di aver quella lode*". Interestingly, Hobbes too pointed out that the dead could not sense if they were praised, although it was useful for the society to believe that they did: *Leviathan*, chap. 11, p. 162: "Desire of praise, disposeth to laudable actions . . . desire of fame after death does the same. And though after death, there be no sense of the praise given us on earth . . . yet is not such fame vain".

act of existing, which continued after its separation from the body.[121] The fact that Sarpi postulated a distinct *facoltà sensitiva* in man might, at first glance, suggest that he divided the soul into two or more parts, as Ockham had done earlier. However, to assume two different faculties of the soul is not necessarily the same thing as assuming the existence of two different souls. In fact, whereas Ockham distinguished two separate souls in man, Sarpi only referred to different faculties of the same soul. The question whether the faculties were really distinct from the soul itself was a long-standing problem amongst the scholastics, but in the course of the sixteenth century it became increasingly common to claim the identity of the soul and its faculties. At the same time philosophers such as Jacopo Zabarella began to distinguish between the sensitive and the rational soul, as Averroës had previously done.[122] Averroës was enthusiastically studied at the University of Padua where Zabarella taught, holding the chair of logic in the 1560s and that of natural philosophy from 1569 until his death in 1589.[123] Sarpi studied at Padua in the 1570s and would have been familiar with both Averroës' and Zabarella's thought, although we have no evidence that would suggest that he adopted their idea of separate sensitive and rational souls. What is clear is that Sarpi did acknowledge sensitive and rational *faculties* of the same soul, and that at least the former was in his view something that a dead body did not possess anymore.

What was, in Sarpi's view, the relation between the body and the soul? Did he regard the former as something corporeal and the latter as something incorporeal? The fact that Sarpi commented on the nature of the incorporeal and the corporeal suggests that he made a distinction between the two, but his evident puzzlement in the face of the problem betrays his hesitation in making such a distinction. He also seems to have postulated a certain union between the body and the soul when, as we have seen, he argued that although movement of muscles was triggered by knowledge this often happened unconsciously. I believe that Sarpi's understanding of the relation between the body and the soul was Aristotelian in that he considered the two fundamentally joined together and thus dependent on one another. Aristotle in fact defined the soul as "the first principle of living things" or "substance as the form of a natural body".[124] At the same time, however, I believe that Sarpi's point of view remained Christian. Sarpi's notion of the soul as a set of faculties, which were dependent on the body (according to him the *facoltà sensitiva*, for example,

121 Maurer 1999, pp. 452–453, 456–457.

122 Park 1988, pp. 477–479, 483.

123 For Zabarella, see Mikkeli 2009.

124 Aristotle, *De Anima*, bk. I, chap. I, p. 126, bk. II, chap. I, p. 157.

ceased to exist when the body died) might seem to distinguish his point of view from that of Aquinas who refuted the opinion that the soul would be something corporeal and claimed, instead, that the soul was "the act of a body", just like the "heat, which is the principle of making hot, is not a body, but an act of a body".[125] However, that Sarpi considered the soul dependent on the body does not mean that he considered the soul corporeal (we have already seen that he regarded the soul's intellective faculty as something incorporeal). Furthermore, his notion of the soul as a set of faculties bears resemblance to Aquinas' theory of the soul as an 'act' of the body, if by 'faculty' we understand power or capability to do something. The compatibility between Aquinas' and Sarpi's theories of the soul lends further support to the view that the latter's understanding of the relation between the soul and the body was based on Christian and Aristotelian interpretations of the problem.

Sarpi's contemporaries expressed various opinions about the soul-body question. In 1581, that is, before the success of the materialistic philosophies in the early seventeenth-century, Philippe Duplessis-Mornay declared that "the human soul" was "not a body".[126] Michel de Montaigne, for his part, announced the error of those who wanted to separate the body and the soul from one another. On the contrary, he argued, the body and the soul had to be joined together so that their "effects" would appear "uniform".[127] Although these two positions seem to clash, Sarpi's point of view was in fact compatible with both of them in that he acknowledged the incorporeal nature of the soul and yet considered the soul and the body dependent on one another. Writing from a very different perspective Hobbes too believed in a fundamental unity of all things when he denied the existence of the incorporeal.[128] Needless to say, Hobbes' argument disturbed the representatives of the Church, since the Christian tradition proposed a categorical separation between the mortal body and the immortal soul. Blaise Pascal in fact considered it necessary to point out that there was nothing as absurd as to claim that "the inanimate bodies have passions, fears, horrors".[129] He stood against the Hobbesian concept of a

125 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, question 75, article 1, vol. I, pp. 378–379.

126 Duplessis-Mornay, *De la Verité*, p. 317: "*L'ame de l'homme . . . n'est point le corps*".

127 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. xvii, p. 396: "*Ceux qui veulent déprendre nos deux pièces principales* (*le corps* and *l'âme*) *et les séquestrer l'une de l'autre, ils ont tort. Au rebours, il les faut réaccoupler et rejoindre . . . à ce que leurs effets ne paraissent pas divers et contraires, ains accordants et uniformes*".

128 Hobbes, *The Elements of law*, chap. XI, pp. 65–66; *Leviathan*, chap. 46, p. 689.

129 Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 41: "*qu'y a-t-il de plus absurde que de dire que des corps inanimés ont des passions, des craintes, des horreurs?*".

material and soulless man and believed that the human sentiments proved the existence of the soul, which, needless to say, he considered incorporeal.

According to Hobbes, the soul was mortal by nature, but the omnipotent God had the power to revive it on the day of judgment. In the *Appendix* which Hobbes added to the 1668 Latin edition of the *Leviathan* he stated that "we must also concede that life and soul are the same thing, since they are never explicitly contrasted in the Sacred Scriptures". He nevertheless remarked that the difference between the body and the soul remained inexplicable, "unless one concedes that eternal life does not begin for men earlier than the resurrection". What he meant was that man was not immortal by nature, but he would be revived on the day of judgment, which, in turn, suggested that the body and the soul were one in the sense that the soul died with the body at the moment of death. "What need is there then", he wrote, "for the faithful man to attribute his immortality to creation, that is to nature, rather than to redemption?"[130] He made a distinction between the opinions of philosophers and the Scriptures, discarding the first and accepting the latter as his guide, and argued that the only "type of immortality ascribed to the human soul" in the Scriptures was the one "given men under the name of eternal life".[131] Hobbes was even more straightforward in the *Leviathan*, where he stated that in the Bible there "is no natural immortality of the soule" and that the "kingdome of God by Christ beginneth at the day of judgment" when "the faithfull shall rise again".[132]

Although Sarpi (unlike Hobbes) believed in the existence of the incorporeal, his point of view was fundamentally identical to that of Hobbes. Both believed in the natural mortality of the soul and in the soul's resurrection on the day of judgment. To try to grasp Sarpi's idea of the nature of the soul in greater detail is difficult, not the least because he nowhere explained what exactly he understood by concepts such as 'incorporeal' and 'sensory faculty'. It is my conclusion that Sarpi assumed the existence of an incorporeal soul—or an incorporeal faculty of the soul—which was, however, fundamentally joined to and dependent on the corporeal body. That he could not understand how the incorporeal could make the corporeal move does not mean that he denied

130 Hobbes, *Appendix to Leviathan*. I quote from Wright 2006, pp. 68–69: "*Mihi quidem differentia illa inexplicabilis est, nisi concedatur vitam aeternam hominibus non incipere nisi a resurrectione, et vitam et animam eandem esse rem, cum in Scripturis Sacris nusquam aperte distinguantur . . . Quid ergo opus est pio homini immortalitatem suam creationi, id est, naturae, potius quam redemptioni, attribuere?*". The English translation is by Wright.

131 Hobbes, *Appendix*, p. 62: "*attribuitur animae humanae immortalitatis . . . quae hominibus sub nomine aeternae vitae data est*".

132 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 44, pp. 645–646.

that existence of the former. Also, the fact that he failed to define the nature of the incorporeal suggests that he considered it a divine matter. It is therefore safe to conclude that his idea of the natural mortality of the soul in no way contradicted his belief in Christian God.

Controversial as it was, the idea of the natural mortality of the soul must have been a relatively unproblematic notion for those Christian thinkers who had already rejected the Catholic interpretation of salvation with its concept of purgatory, a stage between life and death. In England, for example Hobbes, Milton, Thomas Browne and Richard Overton seem to have believed in the natural mortality of the soul. These thinkers were Christians who, like Sarpi, believed that God revived the dead on the day of judgment. It has been argued that this line of thought was rather a continuation of the earliest traits of the Reformation than the prelude to the Enlightenment. The epistemology of these Christian mortalists was based on the word of God as communicated to mankind in the Bible. Instead of Epicurus and Lucretius they found their inspiration from Luther and, in most cases, from the Anababtists. They disregarded philosophers like Aristotle, Averroës and Pomponazzi, since they believed it was impossible to defend immortality of the soul on philosophical grounds.[133] While ascribing man's salvation exclusively to omnipotent God, Christian mortalists—and Sarpi—aimed to strip the clergy of its power to control individual believers through a complex theological system, which included ideas such as purgatory.

The similarities between the English mortalists and Sarpi are striking, although the latter expressed his views on the soul's natural mortality less explicitly than Hobbes, for example. This was probably because of Sarpi's cautious character, but also because he lived in a Catholic republic. Moreover, Sarpi's natural philosophy developed concurrently with the earliest stage of the scientific revolution and the emergence of the materialistic philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, while the English mortalists belonged to a younger generation who grew up in a world drastically altered by these philosophies and scientific innovations. Fundamentally, however, Sarpi's position, at least by the time he wrote the *Arte di ben pensare* around 1609, was the same as that of the English mortalists. Not only did he share their fideism, but also their idea of the soul's natural mortality and belief in its resurrection on the day of judgment. Furthermore, the rejection of the soul's innate immortality was in keeping with Sarpi's insistence on the humbleness of man's condition, in particular with regard to the omnipotence of God.

133 Burns 1972, pp. 2–5, 8–9.

CHAPTER 6

Servitude to God and State

Papal Power

Sarpi lived in a period that has variously been labeled the "century of genius", the "age of reason", "age of absolutism", a period of "crisis", and, more precisely, the period of "*crise de conscience*".[1] In addition to this, the political development of early-modern Europe has been characterized as a "theologico-political problem".[2] This was no doubt true about the political climate of the late sixteenth century, a period marked by the post-Tridentine religious turmoil. While some thinkers and politicians continued to merge religious insights into their political views, others made a resolute attempt to keep these two strictly separated. It nonetheless was the case that most political discourse of the day was flavoured with the "theologico-political problem" in the sense that even those who were in favour of the separation dedicated much of their time to writing about church-state relations. Especially after the turn of the sixteenth century some of these writers—including Sarpi—advocated the independence of the state from the church through absolutistic language. What interests us here is that, besides the absolutistic tenor, Sarpi's choice of words often expressed an eagerness to obey and serve. Both the absolutistic and the submissive aspect were present for example in his very first *consulto* for the senate of Venice, in which he claimed that he desired nothing in his life "more ardently, than to be in some way capable to serve" his "prince".[3]

Many of the choices Sarpi made throughout his life convey his willingness to submit himself to a higher power, whether this was the common opinion, fate, temporal authority or God. The will to serve was in the heart of his religious, ethical and political thinking, and one of the dominating characteristics of his personality. But why did he choose to serve the state rather than the church or the pope, his religious superior? In order to answer this question, we need to understand what he thought of the church and the papacy on the one hand, and the state on the other.

1 *The Reformation in historical thought*, Dickens, Tonkin, Powell, 1985, p. 93.

2 Manent 1996, p. 4.

3 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 444: "*nissuna cosa ho desiderato più ardentemente alla vita mia che di poter esser atto in qualche maniera di servire la Serenità vostra, mio principe*".

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According to Sarpi the most important political problems issued from misconceptions about the nature of the papacy. In a letter to Leschassier he declared that "all the religious controversies that trouble the world" can be reduced to one source, namely, "the power of the pope".[4] Salvatorelli, for instance, has termed Sarpi's obsession with this idea a "fixation" in the very psychological sense of the word, although in his view Sarpi's interpretation of the nature of the papacy was far from unambiguous.[5] Salvatorelli's criticism derived from Sarpi's tendency to define the papacy almost exclusively through negation—by declaring what the pope was *not* supposed to do—or, on other occasions, to hurl a forthright invective at the pope and his supporters without specifying what it was that he actually understood by the papacy. What is evident, however, is that the nature of papal power was the behemoth that haunted Sarpi throughout his life. He explicitly denied the pope any power in temporal matters outside the Church State and, at the same time, remained silent about such power within the Church State. Despite Salvatorelli's doubt, the message seems sufficiently clear: in Sarpi's view the papacy was exclusively a spiritual institution and this was supported by his depiction of the Church as a *congregatio fidelium* and the clergy in general as an institution void of coercive power.

Sarpi acknowledged the pope's leadership in purely spiritual matters and noted that no one who had read history could deny the "primacy, or rather, principality of the Apostolic See". The problem was, however, that the popes gradually began to aspire not for "*primatus*", but for "*totatus*", a concept, with which Sarpi denoted sovereign, all-embracing power. This was achieved by "abrogating every order", after which "everything becomes completely assigned to one", the pope himself.[6] While conciliar theorists adapted their idea of ecclesiastical hierarchy to secular governmental system, some canon lawyers began to describe papal authority with concepts drawn from legal and political discourse. Jacques Almain, for instance, defined the pope's public power as one, which included the right to compel and "to punish sins, confer benefices, promulgate laws, excommunicate, degrate, confer indulgences".[7] This

4 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 7 December 1610, p. 98: "*Ego id divino fore, ut tandem omnes controversiae, quae de religione orbem turbant, in hanc unam, quae de papae potestate est, desinant*".

5 Salvatorelli 1953, p. 331.

6 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 15 September 1609, p. 134: "*Apostolicae sedis primatum, imo et principatum, nemo gnarus antiquitatis et historiae negavit . . . non est primatus, sed totatus . . . abrogato omni ordine totum omnino uni tribuit*".

7 Oakley 1991, pp. 162–163.

corresponded well to what medieval thinkers referred to as *plenitudo potestatis*, the fullness of papal power. While some champions of papal authority were eager to extend the *plenitudo* to cover every prerogative pertaining to secular rulers, such opposing theorists as Marsilius of Padua (1275–1342) denied ecclesiastics any such power. The latter expressed his view of the superiority of imperial authority over that of the papacy in his *Defensor pacis* (1324), one of the most significant political treatises of the Middle Ages. Not surprisingly—and with good reason—Sarpi was accused of sharing Marsilius' point of view. Although the latter explicitly attacked the concept of the fullness of power, claiming that the "bishops of Rome" used the concept in order to secretly gain "the supreme coersive authority and jurisdiction over all the principalities, peoples and individuals" of the world, Sarpi saw no particular threat in the *plenitudo potestatis* as such: "the source and origin of all the abuses is not the *plenitudo*, but the excessiveness or the exorbitance of power".[8] It is nonetheless evident that Sarpi agreed with Marsilius' basic point of view, in particular with the argument that papal power did not cover temporal matters, because these pertained exclusively to secular rulers.[9] In Sarpi's view the principal goal of any major church reform had to be the nullification of what he considered the root of all problems, namely, the popes' aspiration towards *totatus*.

Perhaps even more than the writings of Marsilius of Padua, it was William of Ockham whose example inspired Sarpi's antipapal attitude. Ockham's four-year stint at the papal court in Avignon and his subsequent conclusion that the pope had "fallen into heretical perversity" bears a striking resemblance to Sarpi's criticism of the papacy after his stay in Rome in 1585–1588. Ockham flung himself into a campaign against pope John XXII (1316–1334) whose constitutions he considered perverted by many "heretical, erraneous, silly,

8 Marsilius of Padua, *Il difensore della pace*, vol. II, p. 896: "*auctoritatem sive iurisdiccionem coactivam supremam super omnes mundi principatus, populos et singulares personas . . . hec latenter intendentes per eum quem sibi debitum dicunt titulum plenitudinis potestatis*"; Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 15 September 1609, p. 134: "*Abusum omnium origo et fons est illa non plenitudo, sed redundantia aut exorbitantia potestatis*".

9 For a discussion of the similarities between the theories of Marsilius of Padua and Sarpi, see Piaia 1977, pp. 397–403. While Piaia points out that Sarpi never mentioned Marsilius' name in his writings and that it is difficult to prove any direct influence from the latter's half on Sarpi, he nevertheless argues that Sarpi knew Marsilius' political doctrines *indirectly* and that between the two there was a "singular affinity" as regards their temperaments and "historical and politico-religious prospects" (*singolare affinità di temperamento e di prospettiva storica e politico-religiosa*).

ridiculous, fantastic, insane, and defamatory" things.[10] Correspondingly, Sarpi attacked Paul V whom he accused of having reduced the pontifical office into an instrument for the expansion of ecclesiastical power, which Sarpi bitterly described as his only goal as the head of the Christendom. According to him Paul V aimed to acquire and transfer the "spiritual and temporal monarchy of the whole world to the Roman Pontiff" to the effect that the pope would be elevated "above the kings" and the laity would be "subjected to him".[11] Both Sarpi and Ockham were Catholic friars who blatantly rejected the idea of *plenitudo potestatis* and, not surprisingly, both were excommunicated and died as outcast critics of the Church of Rome, a fact which has contributed to the great variety of interpretations of their religious and political views.[12]

Equally, the papacy had its defenders. Tommaso Campanella, for example, attacked the Venetians and referred to the pope as "the vicar of the first reason" and as "the head and pastor of all reasonable men, that is, of the entire human world", so that "the Venetians and the princes, if they govern their states with reason and not by chance, are subjects of the lieutenant of the first reason". Furthermore, Campanella argued that "the pope is omnipotent" while "the opposing theologians"—Sarpi and his colleagues—were "either ignorant or malicious Machiavellians or sold to a jezebel, without spirit".[13] In line with Campanella, the apostolic prothonotary Agesilao Mariscotti (1577–1618) claimed that "pontificial power, being the superior one, has been ordered to govern all the others" and that the pope "is the master of the temporal sword, no less than he is that of the spiritual".[14] This was an attitude not unfamiliar even on the highest level of ecclesiastical hierarchy, as we can judge from a letter to the pope by cardinal Baronio who reminded his superior that the

10 Ockham, *A letter to the Friars Minor*, p. 3.

11 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, pp. 167–168: "*Paolo V, dalli primi anni della sua puerizia, fu dedito e nodrito in quegli studii, che non hanno altro per scopo se non l'acquistare la monarchia spirituale e temporale di tutto 'l mondo al pontefice romano . . . inalzandolo anco sopra li re, e sottomettendogli li secolari*". The idea is repeated on page 169: "*assonto al pontificato, niuna cosa si propose per scopo e somma dell'officio suo, se non agrandire l'auttorità ecclesiastica*".

12 For Ockham, see Shogimen 2005, pp. 608–610.

13 Campanella, *Lettere*, pp. 48–49: "*il vicario della prima Ragione . . . è capo e pastor di tutti gli uomini ragionevoli; dunque di tutto il mondo umano . . . li veneziani e li principi se governan con ragion li stati loro e non a caso, son soggetti al luocotenente della prima Ragione . . . 'l papa* omnia potest *. . . e li teologi contrari o son ignoranti o maligni machiavellisti o venduti a iezabel, senza spirito*".

14 Mariscotti, *Aviso sicuro*, p. 72: "*la Podestà pontificia, è come superiore ordinata a regolare tutte l'altre, e che il Papa . . . è Padrone della spada temporale, non meno, che della spirituale*".

papal duty was twofold: "to shepherd and to kill". The pontifex was supposed to protect his herd from "lions and other ferocious animals", and in order to do this, "he is told to kill" the beasts.[15] Nicolò Vigniero replied to Baronio's letter and questioned the pope's duty to shepherd and to kill, since "it was not permitted to the church to use the sword of the civil authority, because it would bring along political punishments within the church". Ecclesiastical and civil authorities were two different things, as Christ himself had said.[16] Furthermore, Vigniero argued that the "power to excommunicate" pertained "to the whole of the church", not to the pope alone. He concluded that the papal excommunication was in fact motivated by "private hatred", "frivolousness, or ambition".[17] The Gallican theologian Edmond Richer (1559–1631) in turn argued that the "Church, as from God, hath neither territorie, nor use of sword, of prison, or of any corporall punishment".[18]

What troubled writers like Sarpi, Vigniero and Richer was the gradual extension of the papal authority into temporal matters. In their view, the popes and other high prelates covetously pursued wealth and political power instead of attending to the spiritual welfare of their Christian subjects. Sarpi repeatedly argued that this was done under the guise of religion and whereas in the time of the apostles people seldom donated or bequeathed property to the church, now such a practice had taken on a veneer of piety. Sarpi complained that the clergy did not care whether the constant flux of money was legal or not, "since in their opinion anything given in the name of religion" was "good". However, he concluded, by doing so clergymen in fact "act against piety and humanity and set the world in confusion".[19]

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15 Baronio, *Epistola*, p. 1: "*Duplex est, Beate Pater, ministerium Petri. Pascere & occidere . . . leonibus & alijs feris animalibus . . . iubetur Petrus eos occidere*". In his *Interdetto*, pp. 205–206, Sarpi referred to this concept of "shepherding" and "killing" as Baronio's theme ("*il suo tema*").

16 Vigniero, *Responsio ad Caesarem Baronium*, pp. 2, 9: "*Neques enim concessum est Ecclesiae, ut gladio civilis magistratus utatur, aut poenas politicas in Ecclesiam invehat: Cum diversissima sint Ministeria, Ecclesiasticum scilicet & Magistratus Politici, ut Christus docet*".

17 Vigniero, *Responiso ad Caesarem Baronium*, p. 10: "*Potestas igitur Excommunicandi . . . ad totam Ecclesiam pertinet*"; p. 21: "*Causae igitur Pontificae Excommunicationis, sunt fere Privata Odia, Pontificatum levitas, aut Ambitio*".

18 Richer, *A Treatise of Ecclesiasticall and Politike Power*, p. 20.

19 Sarpi, *Opere*, pp. 338–339: "*perché parendo loro che ogni cosa inviata al fine della religione . . . sia buona, operano ben spesso contra la pietà et umanità e mettono il mondo in confusione*".

Sarpi accused Paul V of regarding himself as "another God" with "infinite power", as someone who "cannot err" and who "can depose kings".[20] Needless to say, the rivalry between the popes and secular rulers has a long history. For example Gregory VII (1073–1085) claimed that the "pope proceeds from Christ, kings and emperors from Demon", while Boniface VIII (1294–1303) boasted that "I am the Caesar, I am the emperor".[21] In Sarpi's view the pope was simply a man, and as such, liable to err. "It is certain that the pope can err", he claimed, "and many of them have *de facto* erred".[22] This was an opinion that the Jesuit Hernando della Bastida judged to be "not only a heresy, but the mother of all heresies".[23] In general, papal authority and the view that the pope was infallible were efficiently defended by the Jesuits who were, according to Sarpi, ready to "prefer novelties over the pristine in order to better confirm that horrible omnipotence" of the pope. Not surprisingly, Sarpi regarded the Jesuits as the "pestilence of the century".[24] According to him the idea of papal infallibility was an "unknown proposition" in the apostolic era, a remark perfectly in line with his admiration for the early church and with his insistence on the gradual decay and corruption of the Church of Rome.[25]

Conciliarism

Sarpi accused the curia of supporting the popes' lust for power: "the Roman curia is adverse to all cultivated literature", he wrote, and "holds steadfastly onto the barbarisms in laws", because this will "elevate" those books, which argue that "the pope is a god, almighty, someone who can keep the laws in the

20 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 140: "*Papa est altera Deus . . . Papae infinita potestas, Papa non potest errare . . . Papa potest deponere reges*".

21 Emery 1924, p. 326 note 3: "*il Papa procede da Cristo; Re ed Imperatori dal demonio*"; "*Ego sum Caesar, ego sum Imperator*".

22 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, pp. 22–23: "*Questo è certo, che il pontefice può fallare nelli giudicii particolari, eziandio avendo usato ogni diligenza, e anco con buona intenzione: e molti* de facto *hanno errato*". In *ibid.* p. 4, Sarpi claimed that the pope could become a heretic. See also *IIAS*, vol. II, pp. 247–248; *IIAS*, vol. III, pp. 240–241; *SS*, pp. 291–292.

23 Della Bastida, *Antidoto*, p. 10: "*non solamente è heresia, ma è madre di tutte l'heresie*".

24 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 9: "*pestis huius saeculi . . . Sola decreta pontificum vellent, et recentia prioribus praeponi, ut horribilem illam omnipotentiam facilius confirmare possent*".

25 I quote from Ulianich 2006, p. 81: "*proposizione incognita alli antichi 'che il papa non può fallare'*".

box of his chest, cast everyone to hell, and even square the circle".[26] The curia's allegedly unanimous support for papal absolutism dampened Sarpi's hopes of a church reform. His pessimism in this question is reflected by Salvatorelli's claim that Sarpi regarded the act of appealing to a council as futile.[27] There is, however, a *consulto* in which Sarpi posed precisely the question of whether the supreme ecclesiastical power belonged to a council or the popes and concluded that if the popes were not subject to any kind of a judge, all men would have been compelled to obey their arbitrary will. This was an important exception to Sarpi's otherwise absolutistic political thought: whereas temporal sovereigns possessed absolute power and were subject only to God, the popes were spiritual leaders with no absolute power whatsoever and, in his view, their actions were supposed to be supervised by a council which represented the *congregatio fidelium*, the entirety of the church. In keeping with the conciliar theory, Sarpi asserted elsewhere that general councils "represent the church and they have the universal authority".[28]

It is symptomatic of Sarpi's deep-rooted distrust in the clergy that he should specify—in the *consulto* on general councils—that acknowledging the council's authority over the pope did not in any way violate civil laws and temporal authority. Appeals to a council were made only in order to restrain and control the pope, he explained, not in order to submit temporal laws to ecclesiastical power.[29] Furthermore, in the *consulto* Sarpi recommended appealing to a council as a remedy to the interdict conflict. He gave several reasons for this view: earlier examples supported the idea of appealing to a council; Venetians needed a *de iure* justification for their actions; the appeal would have shown that Venetians wanted to live within the universal Catholic church; the appeal would have pleased France, Germany and England, which Sarpi regarded as important allies against Rome, Spain and the Jesuits; and, finally, the appeal was recommendable simply because the council was superior to the pope.

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26 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 34: "*Romana curia omnem politam literaturam adversatur, sed iuris barbariem dentibus et unguibus retinet, et quidni faciat? Sublatis quippe libris illis, ubinam invenient papam deum esse, omnia posse, iura in pectoris scrinio tenere, posse omnes ad inferna detrudere, et tandem etiam circulum quadrare?*". Interestingly, John Donne criticizes the tendency to centralize all power in the hands of the pope and in doing so he uses the very same expression *scrinio pectoris*, a box or a drawer in the pope's chest, where the power was to be invested (Johnson 2003, p. 97).

27 Salvatorelli 1953, p. 330.

28 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 143: "*concilii generali, che rappresentano la chiesa e hanno universale auttorità*". See also Bouwsma 1968, p. 462 and Ulianich 1958, p. 376, who both regard Sarpi as a sympathizer of conciliarism.

29 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, pp. 76–77.

Sarpi justified the last point with a reference to historical examples and to the writings of William of Ockham, Jean Gerson (1363–1429) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). He also remarked that both St. Peter and St. Paul were present at the first council (the council of Jerusalem), a clear sign of the council's superiority over the pope, and pointed out that cardinal Bellarmine himself had said that the question of superiority could only be solved in a general council.[30] Besides this *consulto*, further evidence for the view that Sarpi favoured conciliarism can be drawn from the fact that he corresponded with people who held the conciliarist point of view. One such figure was Leschassier who explicitly denied the popes' superiority over councils and argued that the pope did not have the power to alter laws made by a council.[31] While Sarpi may have been pessimistic about the possibility of a sweeping church reform and the hypothetical success of conciliarist principles, it is nevertheless clear that these were objectives to which he subscribed.

According to Marsilius of Padua the power to decide over religious matters did not belong to the clergy only, but to the entire body of believers, *universitas fidelium*. Sarpi too considered the church a 'convocation of believers', that is, a universal assembly. Ulianich has suggested that Sarpi understood the universal church nominalistically, as a mere idea devoid of a real body or existence.[32] As we have seen, Sarpi's epistemology was based on the nominalist view according to which only particulars exist, while universals are but abstractions. It follows from this that whenever a particular group or convocation of believers convened in the name of Christ and in observance of the religious discipline of the early church, they represented and in them materialized the abstract idea of the universal church. In Sarpi's view the universal church was in the particular convocation, but the particular convocation had to fulfill all the criteria of what constituted the universal church, otherwise it would have been little more than a particular church, dissociated from the rest of the Christianity. In other words, a particular church, failing to meet the criteria of the universal church, was not qualified to represent the totality of believers.

30 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, pp. 78–79, 84–85.

31 Leschassier, *Consulta*, p. 20: "*Non può adunque il pontefice con ragione, rivocar in dubio, di esser Superiore a quei Canoni de Concilij, se però insieme non si usurpa auttorità sopra i quattro Evangelij*"; pp. 20–21: "*il Codice de Canoni della Chiesa Catolica, il quale è composto de primi generali Concilij, & de gli altri, che da quelli sono stati confermati . . . & in quelle leggi, alle quali non può detrahere il Papa, è collocata la libertà della Chiesa, & di tutti i Prencipi, e popoli d'Italia*".

32 Ulianich 1958, p. 377.

In Sarpi's view the universal church was identifiable with the early church, not with the contemporary Church of Rome. Indeed, according to Sarpi the Church of Rome was a particular church—since it had failed to observe the principles that defined the universal church—and as such incompetent to decide over things that concerned the entirety of believers. Furthermore, in line with Marsilius, Sarpi argued that this entirety did not consist of clergy only, but it included the laity too. A church that would have been exclusively composed of clergymen would not have been the "kingdom of Christ, but a part of an earthly state" and "subject to the majesty, which also the laity is subject to". The universal church, instead, was "entirely celestial" and had nothing to do with temporal matters.[33] This lends further support for the view that Sarpi regarded the universal church as an abstract, nominalistic and exclusively spiritual institution.

Sarpi asserted in his *Istoria del concilio Tidentino* that it was a "very old custom in the Christian church" to use synods or councils as the means to "pacify controversies in religious matters and to reform the degenerated discipline". However, ever since the fall of the western empire in 475, universal councils were no longer based on the "unity of the Roman empire", but on the much narrower "unity and communion of those kingdoms and states", which observed the Catholic creed and regarded the pope as the supreme judge of ecclesiastical matters.[34] Furthermore, Sarpi argued that church councils became increasingly dependent on the popes and were eventually summoned for different reasons than had earlier been the case: no longer in order to conciliate religious controversies, but in order to "make war in the holy land, or to appease schisms and divisions within the Church of Rome", or to placate conflicts that took place "between the popes and Christian princes".[35] This change made it

33 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Jacques Gillot, 29 September 1609, p. 280: "*io ritengo chiesa la congregazione dei fedeli, non dei soli ecclesiastici; che se si intendesse così, non sarebbe il regno di Cristo, ma parte di uno stato terreno, soggetto esso pure alla maestà, cui sono soggetti anche i secolari*"; Ulianich 1958, p. 367 note 18, p. 377; Marsilius of Padua, *Il difensore della pace*, II. 2., p. 298; Gewirth 1956, vol. II, pp. lii–liii.

34 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 7: "*mi convien ricordare esser stato antichissimo costume nella Chiesa cristiana di quietare le controversie in materia di religione e riformare la disciplina trascorsa in corruttela col mezo delle convocazioni de'sinodi*"; p. 8: "*concilio universale . . . non derivò più dall'unità dell'Imperio romano, ma . . . dall' unità e communione di quei regni e stati, che nelle cose ecclesiastiche rendevano obedienza al pontefice romano*".

35 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 8: "*non principalmente per sopir le dissensioni della religione, come già, ma overo per far la guerra di Terra Santa, o per sopir schismi e divisioni della Chiesa romana, overo anco per controversie che fussero tra li pontefici e li prencipi cristiani*".

even more difficult to summon an unbiased church council, which would have been strong enough to confront the pope and his influential supporters.

Sarpi's history of the council of Trent gained a wide and approving audience in Protestant countries. This is hardly surprising, because the principal aim of the book was to prove that ecclesiastical councils had become mere manifestations of papal power. For example, while describing the opening ceremony of the council Sarpi related how the bishop Cornelio Musso "invited the forests of Trent to echo to the whole world that everyone should subject himself to the council", because not to do so would only justify the saying that the "light of the pope had come on earth, but the people had loved more the darkness than the light".[36] Sarpi's critique pointed towards Musso's attempt to preserve and strengthen the pope's aura of divinity by associating God's *fiat lux* with a kind of papal luminosity. In another passage Sarpi argued more outspokenly that there had been freedom in the world prior to the existence of the popes, but nothing of that freedom remained in the council of Trent, because the council was subjugated to the papal authority.[37] This was also noticed by the French delegation who criticized the fact that all propositions were mastered by the pope since they were exclusively made by his legates. The French also complained that the council did not pay attention to anything that might have prejudiced "the interest or the authority of the court" of Rome.[38]

The Protestant reformation gave unprecedented strength to an otherwise traditional set of criticisms, which emphasized the corruption, secularization and abuse of power within the Church of Rome. Sarpi sympathized with the anti-papal attitudes of the reformers, but he also esteemed such a papal employee as Francesco Guicciardini who was harshly critical of the Renaissance papacy in his history of Italy. "Having turned all their thoughts on earthly greatness", Guicciardini wrote about the popes, "and not using anymore the spiritual authority, if not as an instrument for temporal purposes,

36 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, pp. 226–227: "*Invitò i boschi di Trento a risuonare per tutto 'l mondo che tutti si sottomettino a quel concilio; il che se non faranno, si dirà con raggione che la luce del papa è venuta al mondo e gli uomini hanno amato più le tenebre che la luce*".

37 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 235: "*libertà, quale era allora quando il mondo era senza papa . . . Trento, dove si ricercava concilio soggetto al pontefice*".

38 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. II, p. 856: "*il concilio non vuol ascoltar cosa che pregiudichi all' utile overo autorità della corte, trovandosi il papa patrone delle proposizioni, avendosi da principio statuito e successivamente osservato che non possi esser alcuna cosa proposta se non da' legati*".

they started to look like temporal princes rather than pontiffs".[39] This was perfectly in keeping with Sarpi's point of view and the resemblance is only enhanced by Guicciardini's historical approach to the matter. The same applies to the Scottish jurist William Barclay (1546–1608), according to whom there were popes who became "kindled by the ambitious lust for power" and began to extend their "empire", "which was originally only spiritual", towards the secular "in great emulation of temporal kings and princes".[40] Furthermore, Barclay concluded that there were no "vestiges or examples of the popes" temporal power" to be found "in the sacred Scripture" or "in the writings of the holy fathers".[41]

Sarpi did not limit himself to rejecting the idea that the popes had temporal authority, he went on to deprive the papacy of all traces of divinity. He considered the pope a man and therefore "subject to imperfections, weaknesses and human errors".[42] Sarpi's position was resolutely anticlerical and he identified his enemies as the papacy, the Jesuits and Spain. To use Sarpi's own concept, Spain and the pope formed a *diacatholicon*, his two-headed Catholic opponent. Micanzio fought the very same enemies and wrote to William Cavendish that "Spanyards, pope, Jesuits are but one thing", which is "so united, that he that thinkes to stand in good termes with one of them, and not with the others is out of his right witts".[43] Micanzio's opinion of the pope echoed that of Sarpi in that it highlighted the pope's liability to follow earthly interests: "he is knowne to be a vassall to the Spanyards, and covetous in his owne particular".[44] Over and over again Sarpi returned to the source of all political problems: the clergy's desire for political or temporal power. Even the Jesuits "were saints" originally and showed no interest in "state affairs", but eventually, towards the end of the sixteenth century, they turned into what Sarpi considered his most dangerous enemy, since, while hoping to "rule the whole world", they were

39 I quote from Prodi 1982, p. 19: "*voltati tutti i pensieri loro alla grandezza mondana, né usando più l'autorità spirituale se non per instrumento e ministerio della temporale, cominciorono a parere più tosto principi secolari che pontefici*".

40 Barclay, *De potestate papae*, p. 36: "*alios* (Popes) *vero … ambitiosa dominandi libidine exarsisse, & magna Regum ac Principum secularium aemulatione, fines imperij sui, quod initio mere fuit spirituale, temporalis potestatis accessione proferre*".

41 Barclay, *De potestate papae*, p. 327: "*Nullum vel in sactis literis, vel in sanctorum patrum scriptis, vestigium aut exemplum temporalis potestatis Pontificie reperiri*".

42 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 240: "*il pontefice … è soggetto alle imperfezioni, infirmità ed errori umani*".

43 Micanzio, *Lettere*, letter of 6 May 1622, p. 167.

44 Micanzio, *Lettere*, letter of 27 December 1619, p. 98.

"more unified, more constant and ardent, and more insidious and angry" than any other antagonist he could think of.[45]

In Sarpi's view the pope, the Jesuits and Spain were the enemies not only of Venice, but of all temporal sovereigns who had not yet fallen under the spell of papal universalism. Venice's most natural allies were France, England and the Protestant princes of Germany, of whom Sarpi in particular admired the French Gallicans and their insistence on the independence of the French king as the head of both the state and the church of France. The example of France encouraged Sarpi during the interdict crisis, which he considered a severe attack on the independence of the republic of Venice. Afterwards he remarked to Leschassier that the church of France was based on "seminars" of "sane doctrin" in stark contrast to Italy, where many learned men believed that papal decrees were as old as the church itself: "our professors are so unlearned in history and chronology, that there are some, who think that the church has never been without decrees". There were, furthermore, "Paduan professors" who judged it heretical to argue that papal decrees were actually a later invention, since, in their view, "the church has always been governed with them".[46] The French were equally hostile towards papal canons and based their interpretation of ecclesiastical government on the decrees of the early church and the *codex Gallicanorum canonum*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The attack on papal decrees was a crucial step in the battle against the clergy. Sarpi considered canons and papal decrees little more than manifestations of the pope's desire to manipulate and govern not only members of the Christian church, but also secular rulers and, especially, their subjects. For a sceptic like Sarpi it was impossible to regard the ever increasing number of religious doctrines as true statements about religion. He could not read, for instance, Conrad Vorstius' *Tractatus theologicus de Deo sive de natura et attributis Dei* (1610) without resentment:

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45 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 7 December 1610, p. 155: "*Li Gesuiti, innanzi che questo Aquiviva fosse generale, erano santi . . . non erano entrati in maneggi di stato, nè avevano pensato di poter mai governar città; che dopo in qua, e sono trent'anni, hanno concepito speranza di governar tutto il mondo*"; Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 11 November 1608, p. 43: "*Non stimo tutti gli altri nemici un punto, rispetto a questi; perché sono più in unione, più costanti ed arditi, e più insidiosi ed arrabbiati*".

46 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 13 May 1608, p. 12: "*habetis seminaria sanae doctrinae . . . Professores nostri ita sunt et historiae et chronologiae rudes, ut sint, qui putent ecclesiam sine decretalibus nunquam fuisse . . . cum semper illis ecclesia gubernata fuerit*". See also Pin 2001, p. 93.

> to want to speak of the nature of God in new ways cannot originate from anything else than the opinion that one is closer to that than others, but one who considers (divine) perfection infinite and likewise all the concepts that can be made of him equally disproportional as distant, never places his (idea of God) before (that of) others and will adore and admire that immensity, and will not try to express it better than the others, which is to want to do what is impossible.[47]

In both cases, the pope issuing a new decree or a theologian like Vorstius publishing a new treatise on religious matters, Sarpi seems to have perceived little more than the work of earthly, human passions—the desire to dominate or to elevate oneself towards God.

Two Kingdoms

As narrated in the Gospel of Matthew (16:18–19), Christ told St. Peter that he was the rock, on which Christ's church was to be built. Since the popes were successors of St. Peter, they became to be considered as the embodiment of the highest ecclesiastical authority, indeed the foundation of the church. At the same time, Charles the Great (742–814) and the Carolingian Christian kingship restored the Roman concept of a king who was at once a king and a high priest, and by so doing fortified the power of secular rulers. The Carolingian monarchy was a theocratic system, in which the king could not only intervene in ecclesiastical matters, but was regarded as a surrogate of God on earth. This Carolingian theocracy relied on the support of the bishops and other prelates who were remunerated with landed property and lucrative vassals, although, at the same time, there always were churchmen who considered clergy superior to laity. Indeed, Pope Gelasius I (492–496) had rejected the idea of investing both temporal and spiritual power in one man already centuries before the establishment of the Carolingian theocracy. The argument ran that these were two distinctive authorities and, in the end, because it was the clergy's task to stand before God, their burden was considered heavier. It followed from this

47 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Jean Hotman de Villiers, 22 June 1612, p. 203: "*il voler parlar della natura divina in nove forme, non può nascer se non dall'esistimarsi più prossimo a quella degl'altri, né mai uno che riputerà quella perfettione esser infinita, et per tanto tutte le concettioni che si possono far di lei ugualmente improportionate come ugualmente distanti, non anteponerà la sua alle altre, et attenderà ad adorare et ammirare quella immensità, et non attentar d'esprimerla meglio degl'altri, che è voler fare l'impossibile*".

that the spiritual power was to be regarded as superior to the temporal. In the eleventh century pope Gregory VII asserted that kings and emperors were little more than lay members of the church, which was at the same time declared independent from any kind of secular intervention. Furthermore, according to Gregory VII the Carolingian notion of sacerdotal king had to be abolished, while the right to use the imperial insignia belonged exclusively to the pope. Gregory VII sought to separate the church and state to the effect that the first would have been established as superior to the latter. Some fourteenth-century theorists went as far as to claim that the pope had the right to judge, depose and concede power to secular rulers. Throughout this period there was an intransigent secular and anticlerical opposition, which argued either that king was Christ's vicar; or that there was a duality of separate and equal authorities, temporal and spiritual, which co-operated for the common good of the Christendom; or that the duality was overlapping, but—unlike in the Gelasian and Gregorian model—the clerical was subordinated to the temporal power.[48]

Sarpi's position within the secular tradition was a combination of the three viewpoints described above in that he regarded temporal sovereigns as God's ministers, postulated a strict separation between the temporal and the spiritual, and advocated the superiority of the former over the latter. Like many of his opponents, Sarpi justified his point of view with examples drawn from the past as testified by his famous and polemic history of the council of Trent. Towards the end of the book Sarpi related the discussion that was held in the council in 1563 on the relations between the "princes" and the "ecclesiastical immunity". This passage clarifies Sarpi's own views about the relations between church and state. At the outset of the discussion the representatives of the Church of Rome demanded that secular rulers made their "magistrates, officials and other temporal lords" show similar obedience to the spiritual power as the rulers themselves were expected to show to the pope and to the "constitutions" of councils. They also initiated the establishment and ratification of thirteen decrees, taken from canons and imperial laws, which defended the ecclesiastical immunity against temporal authorities. These decrees were to be obeyed by everyone under the penalty of excommunication.[49] In the decrees it was stated, for instance, that clergymen could not be judged in a

48 Coleman 2000, pp. 19, 22–25, 27–28.

49 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. II, p. 1188: "*che' prencipi . . . facciano render da' loro magistrati, officiali et altri signori temporali quell' obedienza che essi medesimi prencipi sono tenuti prestare al sommo pontefice et alle consituzioni conciliari . . . statuisce alcune delle cose decretate da' sacri canoni e dalle leggi imperiali a favour dell'immunità ecclesiastica, le quali debbino esser osservate da tutti sotto pena d'anatema*".

temporal court; that no layman could nullify or prevent an excommunication; that the emperor or a king or a prince could not make any commandments in matters concerning ecclesiastical reasons or persons; that the clergy's temporal jurisdiction, which included *merum imperium* (the power to issue death sentences), could not be disturbed; that laymen could not appropriate any vacant benefices under the pretext of custody, "*iuspatronato*" or protection; and that ecclesiastics did not have to pay taxes for their patrimonies or any properties that belonged to the church.[50]

Each of these decrees alone would have been enough to upset the representatives of temporal power, not to mention the impact of all thirteen of them broached together, but from the point of view of the papal legates they constituted what they understood with the immunity or freedom of the church. It was in particular the claim that the clergy was exempt from temporal jurisdiction and that they themselves possessed temporal or coercive jurisdiction, even the power to give death sentences, that evoked a strong reaction from the delegates of temporal rulers. The emperor Ferdinand I himself wrote to cardinal Giovanni Morone, the last prelate to chair the council, that he would never—neither as the emperor, nor as the archduke of Austria—accept that the council discussed issues such as reformation of temporal jurisdiction. French ambassadors prepared their protest and Arnaud du Ferrier (who later became Sarpi's friend and no doubt an important source for his history of the council of Trent) gave a long speech in which he noted that for more than 150 years the French kings had insisted that the popes arranged the reformation of ecclesiastical discipline, but now the council wanted to reform secular rulers instead. Sympathizing with the French in his *Istoria del concilio Tridentino* Sarpi described how Du Ferrier bitterly concluded that the proposed reform of secular rulers was aimed to "remove the freedom of the Gallican church and to offend the majesty and authority of the most Christian kings".[51] As Sarpi was keen to point out, Du Ferrier's speech provoked zealous objections from the clergy and even in Rome the cardinals who were gathered in the consistory

50 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. II, pp. 1188–1190.

51 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. II, p. 1191: "*E l'imperatore, vedutigli, scrisse al cardinal Morone che né come imperatore, né come arciduca assentirebbe mai che si parli in concilio di riformar giurisdizzione de' prencipi*", p. 1192: "*e tutto quel capo che parla della riforma de' re e prencipi non aver altra mira che a levar la libertà della Chiesa gallicana et offender la maestà et autorità de' re Cristianissimi*".

declared that temporal rulers "wanted the freedom of the council . . . but only in order to destroy the ecclesiastics".[52]

The opposition to the thirteen decrees was sufficiently resolute as to leave the problematic boundaries between the temporal and the spiritual power unsettled.[53] The failure of the council, however, gave all the more reason for the papacy to continue to pursue its stand independently and, some forty years later, the incurably problematic relations between the church and the state gave birth to the interdict of Venice. In his *Istoria del concilio Tidentino* Sarpi was keen to emphasize the disunited nature of the church and, besides referring to many conflicts that characterized the council of Trent, he began the book by stating that the council failed to unite the church and, instead, only "reinforced the schism and the obstinacy of the factions" to such an extent that the "discord" became "irreconcilable".[54] If the Church of Rome was to be reformed, Sarpi implied, the reform had to begin from the clergy who needed to regain their original unity and spirituality. Throughout Sarpi's writings there is, however, a persisting sense of pessimism with regard to the prospect of a united, peaceful and apolitical clergy.

Sarpi made a clear distinction between church and state or the spiritual and the temporal. This can be judged for example from the fact that he rejected the claim that the pope was the "head of the Christendom" on the basis of the ambiguity of the term. He pointed out that the concept "Christendom" referred not only to the Christian church, but also to Christian states, which were governed by temporal sovereigns. He also observed that by claiming that the pope was the head of the Christendom his supporters in fact covertly argued that the pope had temporal power over "other Christian princes".[55] Instead, Sarpi insisted that the pope's realm was purely spiritual and consisted of the congregation of believers, *convocatio fidelium*.

Although Sarpi made a clear division between temporal and spiritual power, he ascribed divine origine to both. "It is very well said by the ancients", he

52 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. II, pp. 1194, 1202: "*cardinali in concistoro, li quali dicevano che li prencipi volevano la libertà del concilio . . . ma solo a destruzzione degl'ecclesiastici*".

53 Alberigo 1979, pp. 174–177.

54 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 6: "*questo concilio, desiderato e procurato dagli uomini pii per riunire la Chiesa . . . ha così stabilito lo schisma et ostinate le parti, che ha fatto le discordie irreconciliabili*".

55 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, pp. 64–65: "*Non è meno da laudar in tutto quel modo di dire: 'il papa è capo della cristianità' . . . ma il vocabolo 'cristianità' . . . non significa solamente la chiesa cristiana, ma li stati e regni cristiani . . . si vede sotto questo novo modo di dire che è coperta la fallacia, perché s'intende di concludere che sia capo, cioè che abbia governo nel temporale sopra li altri principi cristiani*".

wrote, "that the ecclesiastics are vicars of Christ in spiritual matters, and the princes are vicars of God in temporal matters".[56] Sarpi did not have to point out that God was Christ's father and therefore his superior, a fact, which suggested temporal rulers superiority over the pope. In Sarpi's view a temporal ruler could interfere in spiritual matters, while the clergy had no authority in temporal affairs. In a similar vein, some medieval theorists had perused the Roman law in order to find support for their claim that secular rulers could exercise jurisdiction both in temporal and ecclesiastical matters. They also argued that temporal power was superior to spiritual because Christ was king due to his divine nature, but priest only by virtue of his humanity. Sarpi's reference to vicars of Christ and vicars of God reflected the same distinction and it seems that he considered Christ a "conciliatory man", not God.[57] This line of thought was confronted by champions of the papacy who argued that the pope alone possessed *plenitudo potestatis*, while the power of secular rulers was always limited and therefore inferior to that of the pope.[58]

There were strong traditions which held that the church was either "a kind of political body" or that there was nothing but one theocratic kingdom led by the pope. Sometimes the church was seen as a duality: the fifteenth-century Spanish theologian John of Segovia argued that the church was "considered in a twofold manner, namely, as the mystical body of Christ and as a kind of political body".[59] Furthermore, thinkers such as Tommaso Campanella argued that Christ had founded but one kingdom, which was ruled by the pope as *vicarius Christi*. In Campanella's view the pope possessed both spiritual and temporal power, including the power to coerce in temporal matters.[60] Needless to say, Sarpi was eager to rebuff these theories. He ascribed political power exclusively to the state and religious services to the church, which means that, in his view, religion was of little importance to politics.[61]

Although Sarpi believed that all secular power was divine in origin, it was essential to his political theory that the nature of the supreme power in any state or society was human, secular and political. In sharp contrast to Campanella's claim that there was only one kingdom, Sarpi maintained that God "established two rules in the world", one spiritual and one temporal, both

56 I quote from Benzoni 1970, p. 50: "*benissimo detto dagli antichi, che gli Ecclesiastici sono Vicarii di Cristo nelle cose spirituali, et li Principi Vicarii di Dio nelle cose temporali*".

57 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 662: Christ was "*un uomo conciliatore, potente senza meno*".

58 Coleman 2000, pp. 28–29.

59 Pelikan 1984, p. 81.

60 Bonansea 1969, pp. 279–282; Wootton 1983, pp. 42, 62: Tuck 1993, p. 71.

61 For this point, see Quaglia 1992, p. 527.

of which were "supreme and independent from one another". The first was "ecclesiastical ministry" (*ministerio ecclesiastico*), run by the "apostles and their successors", and the latter was "political rule" (*governo politico*) of the "princes". In his history of the interdict Sarpi argued that neither rule should have been allowed to interfere in matters which pertained to the realm of the other, although, as discussed below, elsewhere he granted secular rulers the power to make decisions on ecclesiastical matters.[62] In the case of a "Christian republic" where both rules co-existed, Sarpi argued that it was necessary that "one was subordinate to the other, or both of them to some supreme human power", because otherwise the republic would have been a "two-headed monster".[63] Although in general agreeing with William Barclay's view of church-state relations Sarpi rejected his vision of a "Christian republic", in which temporal and spiritual powers were equal and subject to divine power. "No republic can exist or survive without human majesty", Sarpi argued, and concluded that Barclay's theory was based on the fanciful idea of "*Deus ex machina*".[64]

In his correspondence Sarpi referred to Edmond Richer according to whom there were "two powers in a Christian republic, ecclesiastical and regal, neither of which is subject to another, but both are subject to God". Richer's opinion was the same as Barclay's and here too Sarpi disagreed, because an equal distribution of power only produced a two-headed republic, "a monster of short duration".[65] The medieval concept of *unum corpus*, the idea of one kingdom ruled by the pope, was even more objectionable to Sarpi, because this would have turned secular rulers into "vassals and beneficiaries".[66] Instead, Sarpi argued that ecclesiastical power had to be subjugated to the temporal one.

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62 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 290: "*Dio ha instituito dui governi nel mondo, uno spirituale, l'altro temporale, ciascuno di essi supremo e indipendente l'uno dall'altro . . . si che li uni non possino intromettersi in quello che agl'altri appartiene*".

63 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 29 September 1609, p. 137: "*Cum ambae potestates, ecclesiastica et saecularis, ad eandem rempublicam christianam pertineant, necesse est vel alteram alteri, vel ambas alicui summae potestati humanae subesse, vel ipsam christianam rempublicam monstrum biceps fore*".

64 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 29 September 1609, p. 137: "*sine maiestate humana, nulla respublica vel consistet, vel stare poterit*"; Ulianich 1961, p. xciii.

65 Sarpi, *SS*, a letter to Gillot, 8 December 1609, p. 602: "*ille* (Richer) *dicit: sunt duae potestates, ecclesiastica et regia, in christiana republica, quarum neutra alteri subest, sed ambae subiectae sunt Deo. Ego bicipitem ambigo fieri rempublicam . . . monstrum ille minime duraturum effecerit*".

66 Sarpi, *SS*, to Gillot, p. 603: "*Romani nostri volunt regiam pontificiae subici, et unam rempublicam faciunt, cuius princeps papa: id si quis admittat, reges effecerit clientes et beneficiarios*".

This was in line with the political thought of Marsilius of Padua who maintained that the supreme power within a state belonged to the secular government and it could not be rivalled by the pope or other members of the clergy.[67]

Besides making a distinction between the domains of the church and the state, Sarpi divided the first into heavenly and earthly spheres so that there was "one that regards the kingdom of heavens, another that rules this exterior discipline".[68] This definition stripped the clergy of temporal power, because it limited their authority to purely spiritual matters or those matters which pertained to ecclesiastical regulations of the church. Sarpi admitted that Christ had made the ministers of the church part of his regal and sacerdotal power, "but this power is not from this world, it is from the kingdom of heavens". That this power did not include temporal authority was hardly a surprise, since, Sarpi added, these two rules "do not walk the same way, they cannot encounter one another".[69] The same distinction between temporal and spiritual power was made by Sarpi's correspondent Isaac Casaubon according to whom "church and state are indeed two different systems and bodies". While "each received from Christ a full power in their own affairs", Casaubon continued, "in this world the church is subjected to kings", since "its reign would await in heaven". More precisely, "God did not institute sacerdotal power for dominating, but for ministering the divine word and matters".[70] Casaubon, a pious Christian, explicitly ascribed the highest power to temporal rulers: "in a well-organized Christian republic the supreme power is civil, not sacerdotal".[71]

In Sarpi's view the clergy's position was essentially no different from that of other subjects and, therefore, they were obliged to obey secular power: "the ecclesiastics are citizens and part of the republic", he argued, and since the republic "is governed by the laws of the prince", churchmen were "subject to them" (here 'republic' means 'state' and 'prince' indicates sovereign

67 Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, II,V,7., vol. I, pp. 256–258.

68 Sarpi, *SS*, to Gillot, pp. 603–604: "*Ego de potestate ecclesiastica distinxi, ut altera sit quae ad regnum caelorum spectet, altera quae hanc externam disciplinam regat*".

69 Sarpi, *SS*, to Gillot, pp. 604–606: "*At ea potestas non est de hoc mundo, regni caelorum est; nihil quidquam mutuae operae a terreno rege suscipiet, aut praestabit. Quid mirum? Non in eodem ambulant, obviare non possunt*".

70 Casaubon, *De libertate ecclesiastica*, p. 90: "*Sunt sane Ecclesia & Resp. duo systemata ac corpora, quorum utrumque in rebus proprie ad se pertinentibus, plenariam a Christo potestatem accepit: sed cum hoc discrimine, ut Ecclesia regibus in hoc mundo foret subiecta: regnum suum exspectaret in caelis . . . Sacerdotalis potestas non ad dominandum a Deo instituta est: verum ad ministerium verbi & rerum divinarum*".

71 Casaubon, *De libertate ecclesiastica*, p. 89: "*Suprema in Repub. Christiana bene ordinata potestas est civilis, non sacerdotalis*".

ruler). Furthermore, those who maintained that "ecclesiastics are not subject to secular laws" only made the absurd claim "that they have no laws at all". He concluded that the clergy had no power to make laws as regards the "wordly public tranquility", because "God has given it only to secular princes".[72] Yet some members of the clergy argued that they were exempt from temporal jurisdiction by divine law. While Sarpi admitted that such exemptions existed, he nevertheless rejected the idea that they might have been divine in origin and, instead, argued that they were granted to the clergy by temporal rulers.[73] He also argued, again in line with Marsilius of Padua, that coercive power belonged exclusively to secular rulers. At the same time he considered the pope's absolute power, *totatus*, a serious threat to secular authorities and to "good government", which is why God had invested sovereign rulers with "all the power" so that they could "restrain those ecclesiastics who abuse the power of Christ in order to damage the republic".[74]

According to the opposing point of view, held for instance by Bellarmine, spiritual goals were weightier than temporal ones, which is why papal power was to be considered superior to that of secular rulers. This was the so-called theory of the pope's indirect power, *potestas indirecta*, over other sorts of authority.[75] This pro-papal theory was often fortified with a reference to the conventional hierarchy between the soul and the body. For example Antonio Possevino argued that the "divine wisdom" wanted to arrange the co-existence of the two different powers so that "the superior would miraculously help the inferior", just as the soul assisted the body.[76] According to this analogy the church represented the soul and the state stood for the body, its inferior. While this analogy may have had a positive impact on many supporters of the papacy, it must have appeared trivial to Sarpi who believed that the soul, like the body, was mortal.

Despite separating the temporal from the spiritual sphere, Sarpi nevertheless acknowledged that on certain issues the two may overlap. He believed that

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72 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 483: "*Li ecclesiastici sono cittadini e parti della republica; ma la republica si governa con le legi del principe; adunque essi li sono soggetti . . . Quelli che dicono li ecclesiastici non esser soggetti alle legi secolari danno in grande assordità, perché è tanto come se dicessero che sono senza legi . . . tranquillità publica mondana . . . Dio l'ha data alli principi secolari solamente*".

73 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 474: "*la esenzione de'ecclesiastici dalla potestà seculare non è* de iure divino".

74 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 15 September 1609, pp. 134–135: "*igitur Deus qui munus principi tribuit rempublicam regendi, omnem potestatem simul tradidit, ut ecclesiasticos coercere valeat abutentes Christi potestate in reipublicae perniciem*".

75 Höpfl 2004, pp. 339–365; Tutino 2010, *passim*.

76 Possevino, *Risposta*, p. 44: "*Sapienza Divina . . . la superiore aiuti mirabilmente l'inferiore*".

the pope could interfere in spiritual matters throughout Christendom, but secular rulers too had the right to exercise their power in ecclesiastical questions. Sarpi readily acknowledged the pope's authority in matters which were devoid of political implications and, at the same time, granted temporal rulers the right to meddle in religious affairs when these seemed to extend into the political sphere or when the ruler considered them a threat to his subjects. Sarpi corroborated his point of view with references to Catholic writers such as Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560) and Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), and specified that the first was a cardinal who fought against Luther, while Soto was a confessor to Charles V and Vitoria a close friend of Philip II of Spain. All three were, thus, well connected and highly esteemed in the Catholic world, a fact which leant additional strength to Sarpi's argument. According to these figures, Sarpi insisted, temporal rulers had the right to resist a tyrannical and corrupt pope, and, as Soto confirmed, this right was based on natural law and on the law of nations, and it could be extended and applied to ecclesiastical matters too. Although the ruler's "power to resist" was weaker in ecclesiastical questions (because one's right to defend oneself is stronger than the right to defend someone else), it nevertheless existed and therefore, Sarpi argued, "the prince can defend by natural law the church against despotisms, and against the abuse of papal power", and if this was true, "then even more he can defend his subjects, his state, and his majesty".[77]

Once again, Sarpi found support for his argument from France. The king's role as the defender of faith was well established amongst the Gallicans, whom Sarpi read with pleasure. According to Jacques Leschassier, for example, the king of France was the "guard and protection" of the "ancient, true, natural and canonical freedom of the church". Furthermore, the king had authority in spiritual matters and even though he could not "baptize" individuals, he could "make baptize and preach" and "guard the law of the church".[78] In a similar vein, Edmond Richer asserted that "the civill Prince" was the "protector" and "defender" of "divine, naturall and canonicall law", and as such he (and only

77 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 466–469: "*non bisogna negare alli principi quella potestà di resistere alla tiranide, la qual hanno per lege naturale e delle genti, eziandio nelle cose ecclesiastiche . . . Il principe può difendere per lege naturale la chiesa dalle tiranidi, dall' abuso della potestà pontificale; adonque più può defendere li suoi sudditi, lo stato suo e la maestà sua*".

78 Leschassier, *De La Liberté*, p. 12: "*Messieurs, vous avez en France sous le nom du Roy la garde & protection non seulement de la liberté presente, mais encor' de l'ancienne, vraye, naturelle & canonique liberté de l'Eglise*"; pp. 11–12: "*le Roy a en l'Eglise l'authorité de Iosias, ainsi que dit Charlemagne . . . non pour baptiser, mais pour faire baptiser & prescher & faire garder le droit de l'Eglise*".

he) had sufficient coercive power to inflict "corporall punishment" and the power to make laws "for the good of the Church and execution of Ecclesiastical canons".[79] Leschassier's and Richer's claim that sovereign rulers had authority in spiritual matters was shared by Sarpi and some of the leading patricians of Venice: "the cure", Antonio Querini declared, that Venice "has to take of the religion itself and of its conservation" had led venetians to make the laws that resulted in the interdict crisis.[80]

One of these laws restricted the right to build new churches in Venice. While it might not immediately strike us as an act particularly in favour of the conservation of religion, it touched in important ways on the material aspect of the church-state relations. In a *consulto* written in 1606 Sarpi argued that the senate had the power to prohibit the building of new churches, because the 'prince' possessed the land on which the churches were to be built, and this possession and authority was based on divine law. Correspondingly, should the prince have decided to prohibit the fabrication of entirely golden chalices and crosses because of the shortage of gold, he would have done so not in virtue of his power over the chalices and the crosses, but on the strength of his authority over gold, which was not sacred until it was used for a sacred purpose.[81] This suggested that the prince had no power over chalices and crosses once they had been produced and taken into spiritual use. However, in a later *consulto* Sarpi argued that it was legitimate to plunder for example church bells, golden vases and altarpieces during a war. These were sacred objects but they could also be sold and bought, which made them partly temporal by nature (he specified, however, that certain relics and indulgencies were exclusively spiritual objects and could not be sold, bought or plundered).[82]

What is crucial here is Sarpi's argument that if it was the case that the sovereign did not possess authority over "sacred and ecclesiastical things" and that he could not "for the sake of common good prohibit the turning of temporal things into sacred and ecclesiastical", he would have been "deprived of all

79 Richer, *A Treatise of Ecclesiasticall and Politike Power*, p. 25.

80 Querini, *Aviso delle ragioni*, p. 11: "*la cura, che deve havere dell'istessa Religione, & della sua conservatione, l'ha indotta, & astretta a farle*".

81 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 439–440: "*abbia potestà* (*il principe*) *sopra il fondo dove si possono fabricare . . . questo è* de iure divino *. . . se per penuria di oro il principe proibisse che non si facessero calici o croci tutti d'oro, non si direbbe che lo facesse per la potestà che abbia sopra il calice o croce, ma sopra l'oro . . . non son sacri prima che siano aplicati alle cose sacre*".

82 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 14 July 1618, f. 13, cc. 175–175v: "*alcune sono pure . . . et queste non possono cader sotto la ragion di preda . . . ma quelle cose sacre, che constano di spirituale, et temporale . . . può passar nel soldato per ragion di guerra senza nessun obligo di restitutione* ".

his power". In the end, it was possible to use anything in a sacred way. Sarpi used this point to support the sovereign's right to exercise censorship: if the ruler had no power over sacred books, he could not prohibit a printer from printing them, which, Sarpi insisted, would "turn the whole city upside down". Sarpi classified things into temporal and spiritual categories, and this he applied to everything from church bells to the question of jurisdiction. That said, he did acknowledge a spiritual, non-material sphere which was immune to the political rule, but this sphere was common to every Christian. He claimed that as far as divine matters were concerned "not only the clergy, but all believers are exempt from political power", because issues such as "faith, divine cult" and "sacraments" were not political, but spiritual by nature.[83] At the same time, the sole concern of "ecclesiastical authority" was that of "eternal salvation", a conclusion, which allowed the church no earthly interests whatsoever.[84] What was expected from the clergy was not political activity, but, exclusively, "preaching of the gospel, holy warnings and instructions on Christian costumes, the ministry of sacred sacraments, the cure for the poor, the correction of those crimes which excluded the perpetrator from the kingdom of God".[85] On the other hand, Sarpi reminded the clergy of the secular rulers' natural right to "resist tyranny" "even in ecclesiastical matters" so that should the pope or the bishops "squander ecclesiastical property tyrannically", temporal sovereigns could deprive these tyrants of their possessions and "help the church against this pestilence". He then concluded that a temporal ruler "can by natural law defend the church from tyrants and from the abuse of papal power".[86] The harshness of these words no doubt reflected the atmosphere of the interdict crisis, the immediate political context in which they were written.

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83 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 482: "*non solo li clerici, ma tutti li fideli nelle cose di Dio sono esenti dalla potestà politica, come politica, si che non li può prescrivere, né della fede, né del culto divino, né delli sacramenti cosa alcuna*".

84 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 483: "*L'auttorità ecclesiastica non risguarda altro che la salute eterna, né li è concesso aver per fine alcuna cosa temporale*".

85 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 214: "*certa cosa è la somma del carico pastorale essere la predicazione dell'evangelio, le sante ammonizioni e instruzioni delli costumi cristiani, il ministerio delli santissimi sacramenti, la cura delli poveri, la correzione delli delitti che escludono dal regno del Dio*". See also, Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 218.

86 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 468: "*non bisogna negare alli principi quella potestà di resistere alla tirannide, la qual hanno per lege naturale e delle genti, eziandio nelle cose ecclesiastiche . . . se il sommo pontefice o li vescovi* (*che Dio non voglia*) *dissipassero li beni ecclesiastici tiranicamente, o provedessero li beneficii a destruzzione della chiesa, potrebbono li principi proibire il possesso, et aggiutar la chiesa contro questa peste*"; p. 469: "*il principe può difendere per lege naturale la chiesa dalle tiranidi, dall'abuso della potestà pontificale*".

In March 1606 Sarpi wrote an extensive *consulto* on the right of the temporal ruler to judge clergymen who had committed a crime. At the beginning of the piece he asserted that the right of the council of forty to judge clergymen accused of serious crimes could easily be proved by letters of certain earlier popes (the council of forty was in charge of criminal matters, including the cases which required the possession of *merum imperium*). However, Sarpi made it clear that this right was not based on a privilege granted by the pope. He argued that no one could contest the jurisdictional power of the ruler when it was founded on "immemorial custom" and that this power was in fact of a much "higher and older origin" than any papal consent expressed in pontifical letters. The custom that authorized the jurisdictional power of the council of forty had been "legitimately started, continued and prescribed".[87] Elsewhere Sarpi made the specification that the jurisdictional power came from God and was "in conformity with divine law".[88]

Theologians such as Robert Bellarmine and the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) claimed that members of the clergy could be exempted from temporal jurisdiction by three different authorities: secular rulers, the pope, and god.[89] Sarpi repeatedly rejected this point of view during the interdict crisis when he defended Venice's right to incarcerate and judge clergymen who had committed serious crimes. He argued that members of the clergy were "not exempt by divine law from the (power of) secular judges in temporal matters, in civil or in criminal cases".[90] The problem of temporal rulers' right to exercise jurisdiction over members of the clergy was by no means solved at the closure of the interdict crisis, as is clear from the fact that Sarpi struggled with the same dilemma in 1617 when yet another clergyman was charged of a crime by temporal authorities. Here again, Sarpi accused the champions of Rome

87 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 473–474: "*l'auttorità sopra le persone ecclesiastiche . . . viene da più alto e da più antico principio che dalla grazia de' pontifici romani, cioè da una consuetudine legitimamente cominciata, proseguita e prescritta*". See also, *ibid*., p. 507: "*la republica di Vinezia abbia potestà di giudicar ecclesiastici non per alcuna concessione, ma per consuetudine immemorabile canonicamente principiata e prescritta*".

88 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 509: "*dalla clemenzia di Dio abbiamo ricevuto . . . questa potestà*"; p. 510: "*questa potestà, essendo conforme alla lege di Dio dalla quale deriva*".

89 Bellarmine De potestate Summi Pontificis, p. 235: "*Respondeo, clericos non solo privilegio Principum, sed etiam decretis Summorum Pontificum, & quod maius est, divino iure exemptos fuisse*"; Suárez 1619, pp. 213–214: "*vera, & catholica sententia est, clericos iustè potuisse a iurisdictione temporalium Principum eximi . . . exemptionem hanc iustè fieri potuisse tribus modis . . . videlicet a Deo, & a Pontifice, & ab Imperatore, seu Regibus.*

90 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 498: "*Li ecclesiastici non sono esenti dalli giudici secolari nelle causse temporali, così civili come criminali,* iure divino".

of trying to derogate the republic's right to exercise jurisdiction over clergy as they claimed that the accused clergyman should have first been imprisoned by the nuncio and only then surrendered to the temporal court. Sarpi argued that to grant the nuncio the power to do this threatened to "convert the foundations of the public authority" and to constitute an "irreparable prejudice", indeed, "a fatal wound to the public jurisdiction" whose resulting damage was likely to endure perpetually to posterity.[91] It is clear that, for Sarpi, jurisdiction in criminal matters was an irreplaceable element of sovereign power. The government of Venice shared this view and relied on Sarpi's help on jurisdictional questions still after the closure of the interdict crisis. Domenico Molino—one of the leading patricians—wrote in 1612 that Sarpi was "held in higher esteem than ever", and that he "continuously exhausts himself in serving the government", and that the senate made no decision over a jurisdictional matter without having first received his opinion on it.[92] This suggests that Sarpi was respected not only as an expert in theology, an erudite who was consulted for facts, but also as a political adviser whose opinion had concrete influence on the decisions made by the senate of Venice.

State and Religion as Medicines

It was not uncommon for Renaissance and early-modern writers to employ medical terminology in their analyzes of political and social matters. According to Sarpi, for instance, both religion and the state were natural medicines, which existed in various forms. Just as republics were expected to be well proportioned in terms of virtues and vices, likewise religion, or torah, as Sarpi put it, should also be well proportioned. It is crucial to understand that here torah means church's rules, rites and ceremonies, not faith as such.[93] However, these

91 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 25 November 1617, f. 13, c. 86r: "*convertir li fondamenti della publica auttorità . . . mortal ferita nella publica giurisdittione*"; c. 86v: *"pregiudicio irreparabile*".

92 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, Domenico Molino's letter to Jacques Leschassier, p. 250: "*Il Padre Maestro Paolo è . . . più stimato e tenuto caro che mai . . . convenendo di continuo affaticarsi per servitio del publico, tutte le materie giurisdittionali passano per sua mano, né si fa dall'ecc.mo senato alcuna deliberatione in così fatti propositi, se prima non si ha havuto il suo parer in scrittura*".

93 In her note to the *pensiero* Luisa Cozzi defines the 'torah' as '*il complesso delle norme religiose vigenti in una determinata società*'. Logan 1996, p. 501, gives a more detailed explanation for Sarpi's use of 'torah' and suggests that it indicated the 'vulgar religion' that Sarpi referred to in his *Pensieri sulla religione*. Logan argues that Sarpi's 'torah' was 'very

rules and ceremonies were only rarely well proportioned, Sarpi complained, "because there is only one way to do good, infinite ways to make mistakes".[94] Here again Sarpi criticized the great number and diversity of theological doctrines, which only made it more difficult to make use of religion. He argued that "republics" were not maintained by torah, which, indeed, was "not as useful as some people think". Nevertheless, it was used, because "two makes more than one, and every little addition adds". Sarpi's view entirely opposed that of Tommaso Campanella according to whom "no republic or princedom has ever been and will never be without a priest".[95] There were many things at the disposal of a politician, Sarpi observed, and he could fare equally well without torah:

> When a politician founds a city, he wants to use every material he can find: men, money, arms, amusements, medicines etc., and if one of these instruments is lacking, he can do without it. If he also finds torah, he will use it, but he could do without it, should he not find it.[96]

Although both the state and religion (in the sense of torah) were but medicines, Sarpi attributed greater importance to the former. It also seems that in his view the state was a prerequisite for torah, as we can infer from his claim that "the republic is property of man, but the torah is property of the republic", so that torah helps the republic to provide that "which the majesty cannot provide".

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close to Augustinian-Lutheran-Calvinist concept of the "bondage of the law". Vittorio Frajese, 2006, p. 169, in turn defines Sarpi's 'torah' as an "esoteric metaphor" to designate all different forms of religion. I understand Sarpi's 'torah' to mean those religious rules and norms that pertained to what Sarpi considered religion's earthly sphere (as opposed to the heavenly sphere), that is to say, those rules, rites and norms of the church, which turned religion into a social phenomenon. Therefore, 'torah' should not be identified with religion as faith or belief in God.

94 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 403, p. 307: "*ma poche volte avviene, perché una è la via di far bene, di fallare infinite*".

95 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 413, pp. 314–315: "*Non è vero che la Torà ritenga le repubbliche, e che senza lei non sosterebbonsi . . . La Torà dunque non è tanto utile quanto crede alcuno, ma fa perché più fanno due che uno, ed ogni poco d'aggiunto aggiugne*". Campanella, *Parole universali della dottrina politica*, p. 121: "*nessuna Republica, o Principato fu ne si può fare senza sacerdozio*".

96 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 423, p. 320: "*Il politico, in formar la città, si vuol servire di tutta la materia che truova, uomini, denari, armi, spassi, medicine etc. e se alcuno di cotali stromenti manca, egli ne fa senza. Perché anco trova la Torà, se ne serve, ma farebbe senza di lei, se non la trovasse*". In Sarpi's lexicon 'republic' and 'city' often indicate state.

He continued that "the society, the republic and the torah have existed always, when there has been men".[97] The point that Sarpi wanted to make was that the church was only of secondary importance to civic life. States or societies were run by civil laws, not by religious rules, although torah could be useful for maintaining civic harmony.

Sarpi often used medical terminology when he referred to the condition of a state (usually Venice) or commented on the art of ruling. In a letter to Groslot de l'Isle, for example, he remarked that one should not just medicate the sick, but also consider what the sick could endure.[98] This applied to religion as well and Sarpi noted in his *Pensieri sulla religione* that while "every mind" was able to embrace the best possible religion, they could only do so "to the extent of their capacity".[99] To determine the right dose of religious medicine required that the rites and ceremonies were sufficiently modified so that they were accessible and plausible for all. This was done by "sharpening the coarse parts with interpretation" and by "simplifying the subtle parts with a symbol".[100] In Sarpi's view it was the task of the clergy to provide people with interpretation, symbols and mysteries as an integral part of their duty to minister religious services. He emphasized the significance of mystery and symbol in establishing a religion, since they rendered exegetical absurdities into something credible and tangible.[101] At the same time, however, he seems to have considered it possible to lead a perfectly pious life even without religious rites and ceremonies as we can judge from Christoph von Dohna's testimony, according to which Sarpi had asserted that "I do many things against my will, like saying the mass:

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97 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 405, p. 307: "*la repubblica è proprietà dell'uomo, ma la Torà è proprietà della repubblica, provvedendosi con lei a quello a che non può la maestà provedere. La società, la repubblica e la Torà furon sempre, quando fu l'uomo*".

98 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, pp. 51–52: "*convien procedere con molta destrezza, né guardare solo che medicina ricerca il male, ma più tosto qual possi sopportar la debol complessione dell'infermo*". For the classical origins of Sarpi's terminology, see Cozzi 1980, p. 366. Tenenti 1999, p. 71, suggests that medical terminology was much more than a mere metaphor for Sarpi, because it referred to the "concrete" instead of the ideal aspect of "human reality".

99 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 654: "*Le menti tutte ne sono capaci, ma secondo la loro portata*".

100 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 650: "*si assotigliano le parte grosse coll'interpretazione, e s'ingrossano le sottili col simbolo*".

101 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 650: "*Il misterio è molto utile. Il simbolo fa onestar le assurdità interpretato, e dar corpo alla chimera*". For interpretation, symbol and mystery in Sarpi's thought, see Vivanti 1974, pp. lii–liii, and Frajese 1990, pp. 78–79.

I say it as rarely as possible".[102] In the same passage Sarpi remarked that he said the mass only because he was excommunicated: by not saying the mass he would have let the Roman curia think that he respected the ban.

In Sarpi's opinion "true philosophy is not medicine, but food for the soul, while religion is medicine". He also noted that one should not try to cure a sick man with philosophy, because "to him philosophy is harmful" and therefore he "should resort to divine help".[103] In other words, philosophy was suitable for the healthy and the strong, while the weak needed the help of religion. It should be stressed that what Sarpi referred to here was rites and ceremonies rather than faith, the cornerstone of his religious thought. The implication was that the external aspects of religion helped the weak, while the strong were capable of maintaining their personal and spiritual faith even without the assistance of the church. This is exactly how Giovanni Diodati read Sarpi:

> Fra Paolo has fixed himself in the most pericolous maxime that God does not care much about the external, as long as the soul and the heart have that pure and direct intention and relation with Him in Christ, by the light of His word and His spirit; and in this (opinion) he is so strong, with ancient and modern reasons and examples, that there is no use in arguing with him; and all the blows will be extinguished and checked by his natural sweetness and the miraculous maturity of his judgment and spirit, which almost deprives him of every emotion.[104]

Echoing Pierre Charron and Michelle de Montaigne Sarpi argued that "man knows that he is a Jew or a Turk before he knows that he is a man". In his opinion religious identity came from education, which took the form of persuasion by those who wanted to "communicate their knowledge" and to act as a "master", or the form of "hypocrisy", by those who sought some other kind of an advantage. The persuasion was effected "with reason or with miracles" and

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102 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, p. 122: "*Io fo molte cose contr' il mio volere, come dir messa: la dico il più di rado ch' io posso*".

103 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 380, p. 289: "*La vera filosofia non è medicina, ma cibo dell'anima, e medicina sì è la religione* . . . corpora aegra . . . *per questo la filosofia fa danno, ed ai divini aiuti ricorrer bisogna*".

104 I quote from Salvatorelli 1953, p. 340: "*Fra Paolo è fisso in una pericolosissima massima, che Iddio non curi molto l'esterno, purché l'animo e il cuore habbia quella pura e diritta intenzione et relatione a lui in Christo, pel lume della sua parola et del suo Spirito; et in quella è per maniera fortificato, per ragioni et essempli antichi e moderni, che poco avanza combattergliela; e tutti i colpi vengono ad ammorzarsi e rintuzzarsi in quella sua dolcezza naturale e mirabile maturità di giudizio e di spirito, che lo tiene quasi fuori d'ogni emozione*".

it may have involved "simulation", which was only natural, because "every man agrees that a lie is good" when it "makes one believe that what is true and useful by false premises".[105] At least as far as religious education was concerned Sarpi deemed lying acceptable in political rhetoric, because the implications of a well-established religion were positive. While it was licit to exploit torah for political purposes, this required great prudence, because religion was liable to change "either because many of them intermix to form one, or because one becomes attacked by a contrary one and destroyed". Sarpi then concluded that "this is what religion did to society".[106] His argument that religions were unstable and blended and destroyed each other and, in the worst case society, implied that he believed in no such thing as one true religion (religion understood as torah). This explains Sarpi's hostility towards religious dogmatism and his opposition to the political engagement of the clergy. It seems that his understanding of a proper religious education included instruction on church-state relations, the key to which was—in his view—on the acknowledgment of the divine origins of secular authority. This was, however, unlikely to happen. "Now that ignorance is commended", Sarpi complained to Leschassier, it was hardly the time to establish the biblical origins of sovereign power.[107]

Excommunication

In the context of the interdict crisis Sarpi identified the most crucial problem in church-state relations as the right to use coercive power. From the Venetian point of view the crisis was about the question of whether the pope could force Venice to obey his will by using the spiritual weapon of excommunication. Not surprisingly, Sarpi was asked to write a *consulto* on the validity of just and unjust excommunication just a few months before the beginning of the

105 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, pp. 651–652: "*L'uomo sa prima d'esser ebreo o turco che d'esser uomo . . . Si persuade con ragione o con miracoli . . . fizzione è naturale, perché ogn'uomo ha opinione che il mendacio sia buono in ragion di medicina e di far bene a far creder il vero et utile con premesse false*"; Charron, *Of wisdom*, bk. II, chap. 5, p. 279: "he is circumcised, babtised, a Jew, a Christian, before he knowes that he is a man"; For Montaigne (and Charron), see Wootton 1983, p. 25, and Luisa Cozzi's note 17 in Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, pp. 651–652.

106 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, n. 405, pp. 307–308: "*ovvero perché molte si mischiano insieme a farne una, ovvero che una vien assalita da un suo contrario e distrutta. Così alla società fece la Torà*".

107 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 8 July 1608, p. 18: "*Quod reges et optimates in divinis literis iura sua perspiciant non est eius temporis, quando ignorantia commendatur, et necessaria praedicatur*".

interdict controversy. In the text he first declared that the question was easy to answer and then explained the origins of excommunication: it was established by Christ against "great sins", he asserted, and for the benefit of the "Church in general and every believer in particular", the point being that excommunication was originally meant to be used for the good of the whole community of believers and not for the political interest of the leaders of the church. During the early church such sinners who were not capable of rectifying themselves, were leniently corrected and where they had acted out of ignorance, they were instructed and guided back to the right path. Only those sinners who obstinately persisted in their wickedness and thus gave a bad example to others were separated from the union of believers. In Sarpi's time, however, it was possible to become excommunicated on the sole basis of not being able to make a payment to the church. Furthermore, Sarpi argued that while the monition that preceded excommunication used to convey an explanation of the sin that had been committed and instructions for avoiding a relapse, it was now a mere formula of four words: "we warn for the first, the second and the third time, and peremptorily". This was then immediately followed by the act of excommunication.[108] Sarpi also remarked that since an unjust excommunication had no other effect than that of endowing the condemned with a greater portion of God's grace, and since every acquitted criminal whose guilt in reality would merit such punishment would nevertheless face the flames of hell, the misuse of excommunication only postponed final and inevitable judgment. In brief, excommunication never removed the grace of God, nor did it cast anyone to hell. Not only did an unjust sentence increase the future blessedness of the innocent who had been condemned and the eventual affliction of the sinner who had been acquitted, it also meant that the individual who issued such a sentence committed a sin: "God is the prince, the prelate is the minister", Sarpi wrote, "if we have not offended God in that which the minister accuses us of, divine grace will remain complete in spite of the unjust sentence of the prelate who shall therefore be castigated by God".[109] Thus Sarpi in effect implied that by placing Venice under the interdict the pope would commit a sin and faced, consequently, the risk of God's punishment.

108 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 445–448: "*La censura della scomunica contro li enormi peccati fu instituita da Cristo nostro Signore per utilità della chiesa in universale e di ciascuno delli fedeli in particolare . . . monemus primo, secundo, tertio et peremptorio*".

109 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 451–452: "*Dio è il principe, il prelato è il ministro: se noi non averemo offeso Dio in quello che il ministro ci oppone, ne resterà la grazia divina intiera, non ostante la ingiusta sentenzia del prelato, il quale perciò sarà castigato da Dio*".

There were two sorts of unjust excommunications, Sarpi specified in one of his first *consulti*. First, the sentence was unjust even when the reasons behind it may have been just and legitimate, if the person issuing the sentence acted not out of charity, but out of anger, hatred or other mundane motivation. Second, the sentence was unjust when used against an innocent person. To ascertain whether an excommunication was just it was enough to determine whether St. Peter would have given the same sentence, Sarpi argued. If, instead, the sentence was "far from apostolic charity and modesty, we do not believe that it has the force of apostolic authority".[110] It was typical of Sarpi to assess an ecclesiastical matter such as excommunication from the point of view of the early church. In so doing he challenged the champions of the papacy to justify new papal decrees and other such initiatives, which were not in use during the early church. This shows how much weight Sarpi put on historically proved and justified arguments.

Sarpi repeatedly questioned the power ascribed to the pope by his followers. In his view, high prelates were driven by earthly interests, which were best promoted by asserting the papal *plenitudo potestatis*. Even when a bishop, for example, dared to criticize curia of worldly interests he was quickly silenced by the promise of a lucrative benefice or a cardinalate. That the curia was successful in manipulating bishops is suggested by Sarpi's remark to Leschassier that it is "deplorable" that the bishops "prefer servitude over freedom".[111] At the same time, it is clear that Sarpi too led a life of servitude. He credited absolute power to secular rulers, justified their arbitrary rule simply by stating that they represented God's will, and submitted himself unconditionally to the service of the state. However, the servitude that he accused the bishops of was one of sin, whereas the servitude that he had chosen for himself was one performed to God. In general, his arguments were often little more than a mirror image of those of his opponents with the only difference that his were aimed to support temporal authority instead of the papacy.

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110 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 454–455: "*se la truoviamo lontana dalla carità e modestia apostolica, non crediamo che abbia forza dalla auttorità apostolica*".

111 Sarpi, *Opere*, a letter to Leschassier, 14 October 1609, p. 265: "*se è libero un grande beneficio nelle mense vescovili . . . è deplorevole che preferiscano la servitù alla libertà . . . ne è causa l'ambizione; infatti con questi mezzi tentano di dare la caccia al cardinalato . . . e la curia con questa speranza tutti allatta*"; Salvatorelli 1953, pp. 332–333.

CHAPTER 7

Sovereignty, Obedience and Absolutism

> And whereas before, all authority, both in religion, and policy, was in the high priest; so now it was all in the king.
>
> HOBBES, *Leviathan*

The Interdict Crisis

Sixteenth-century city-states like Venice were uncomfortably positioned between two giants, the Holy Roman Empire and the Church of Rome. It has been observed that theirs was the position of "particulars" who tried to cope with two "universals".[1] For a long time after their defeat to the French army at the battle of Agnadello in 1509 Venetians remained passive in international politics, but towards the end of the century the emerging party of the *giovani* led by Leonardo Donà, Nicolò Contarini and Antonio Querini stirred up the dormant sense of patriotism in their fellow patricians. This created an atmosphere of impatience and pride, a short-lived echo of previous ventures to surpass the limits of the insular city-state, and as before, the attempt that followed resulted in a severe conflict with one of the two 'universals', the papacy. Paradoxically, the reawakening of the aristocratic pride and self-awareness of the Venetian nobility was most adeptly verbalized by a humble Servite friar of non-aristocratic lineage.

Sarpi certainly played a central role in the political life of early-seventeenth-century Venice, although scholars such as Ludvig von Pastor have credited him with more influence than he actually had. Pastor, a Catholic historian eager to prove Sarpi wrong—to him Sarpi was an irreligious "denier of the immortality of the soul"—argued that the republic of Venice proceeded under his guidance from the very moment he was appointed state theologian. According to Pastor Sarpi was the "true champion of the republic", his learned opinions determined "the steps of the *signoria*", and his contribution turned the controversy over particular rights and laws into a controversy over principles.[2] To accept that this was the case seems tantamount to the assumption that the clash between

1 Manent 1996, p. 6.

2 Von Pastor 1962, pp. 97, 99–100: "*vero campione della Repubblica . . . i passi della Signoria . . . senza religione, senza fede, senza coscienza, negatore dell'immortalità dell'anima*".

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Venice and Rome should be attributed to Sarpi's provocative and aggressive leadership. This was clearly not the case. In the first place, the tension between Venice and Rome was real and longstanding, regardless of Sarpi's conspicuous defence of Venice's interests. Secondly, in spite of his influence, Sarpi was and remained an *adviser* who could never gain a status equal to that of the patricians in charge of the republic.

The rivalry between Venice and Rome is something of a commonplace in medieval and early-modern history. At times it turned into open hostility, as we can judge from Agesilao Mariscotti's remark that there was nothing new in Venice's "attack against ecclesiastical liberty" during the interdict crisis, since Venetian patricians had entertained "such a venomous thought" for a "long time".[3] On the other hand, several popes imposed an interdict on Venice during the later Middle Ages (Innocent III in 1201, Martin IV in 1282 and Clement V in 1309). On each occasion Venetians reacted by accusing the pope of using a spiritual punishment as a political instrument. When Sixtus IV placed Venice under the interdict during the war of Ferrara (1482–1484), Venetians kept the ban secret and carried on as usual, and eventually, after having consulted several canon lawyers, defended themselves by declaring the interdict unjust and invalid. In the early sixteenth century Julius II assumed the role of an adamant defender of the ecclesiastical, spiritual and temporal power of the church and imposed an interdict on Venice in 1509. The republic responded as previously and defined the ban to be politically motivated and therefore unjust, and prohibited the publication of the censure.[4]

The tension between Venice and Rome was in part the result of different views on the scope and the nature of spiritual and temporal authorities. In the court of Rome Venetians were often seen as unpious advocates of temporal power and obstinate antagonists of the papacy. Pius II (1458–1464), for instance, called Venetians "the least just" amongst human beings, "comrades of marine monsters", Godless hypocrites who regarded the state as a "deity". The interest of their republic was more important to them than anything else and Venetians eagerly asserted their right to "do anything that will bring them to supreme power", so much so that "all law and right may be violated for the sake of power".[5] Venetians were, however, equally prejudiced and suspicious of Rome.

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3 Mariscotti, *Aviso sicuro*, p. 1: "*non è nuovo in quella Republica l'oppugnare la libertà Ecclesiastica . . . esser già molto tempo, che vive in quei Signori tal velenoso pensiero*".

4 Bouwsma 1968, pp. 80–81, 98–100.

5 Bouwsma 1968, p. 47.

With such a history of enmity, it is hardly surprising that Venice and Rome collided drastically also in Sarpi's life-time. The clash took place during the papacy of an exceptionally determined pope, Paul V, who placed Venice under interdict in May 1606.[6] In the same move he excommunicated the senate and its advisers, including Sarpi. The interdict crisis inspired political writers to redefine the relations between temporal and spiritual power. Not only Venetian and Roman writers, but French, English, Spanish and German too understood that the seemingly trifling quarrel had implications that would reverberate all around Europe. With hindsight the interdict appears as a logical conclusion to a century full of challenges posed to the papacy by temporal rulers such as Henry VIII of England, Gustav Vasa of Sweden, Henry IV of France and the Protestant princes of Germany. At the same time, it was one of the major events that paved the way for the thirty years war.

Relations between Venice and Rome started to deteriorate already during the papacy of Sixtus V who quarreled with the republic over questions related to Ceneda and the Adriatic sea. In 1582 Venetians summoned the bishop of Ceneda to Venice on the grounds that he had abused his power, which, the Venetians declared, was inferior to the supreme power of the government of Venice. Sixtus V defended the bishop, and while this can be seen as a prelude to the interdict crisis, it was only around 1603 that the clash became imminent.[7] By this time relations between Venice and Rome had turned notably worse and the pontificial nuncio to Venice reported anxiously that there was an "increasing number" of senators who talked "fiercely against anything concerning the church", while there were only few senators who had "the courage to openly oppose them".[8] In the same year the senate of Venice decreed that it was forbidden to build new churches or other sacred places in the territory of the republic without its permission. Two years later the senate restricted the alienation of land property from laity to clergy. Furthermore, Venetians imprisoned two clergymen accused, among other things, of murder and the corruption of public morality. The pope reacted in 1605 by sending two letters

6 For the interdict, see Bouwsma 1968, pp. 340–358, 371–415; Cozzi 1995, pp. 77–120; Salvatorelli 1959, pp. 67–95; Wootton 1983, pp. 46–76. There is a vast literature on the interdict of Venice. Indeed, Wright 1974, p. 534, argues that the event has drawn too much attention. However, I believe that for example the polemical pamphlets written during the interdict still offer a good source for scholars interested in the history of political and religious ideas of the period.

7 Cozzi 1995, pp. 249–250.

8 Cozzi 1995, pp. 85–86, 109 note 80, the quotation is on page 77: "*crescendo sempre il numero di senatori che acerrimamente parlano in Senato contro qualunque cosa spettante all'ecclesiastica, havendo pochissimi altri l'ardire d'apertamente opporsi loro*".

to the government of Venice, in which he demanded not only the abrogation of the laws of 1603 and 1605, but also the extradition of the clergymen to his nuncio so that they could be judged by an ecclesiastical court instead of a temporal one. Were his demands not met, he threatened to excommunicate the senate and place the entire republic under an interdict. After few months of diplomatic conflict, the pope was forced to carry out precisely this action. As a reaction to this, the senate of Venice declared to the papal nuncio that "we consider this excommunication unjust, invalid and null, because it is contrary to our temporal jurisdiction, to the liberty of our state, and to the preservation of the faculty, the honour and the lives of our subjects".[9]

Sarpi was nominated a legal adviser to the senate of Venice in January 1606 and he dedicated himself to the role with such a fervour that certain contemporaries soon came to see him as the actual leader of the republic. Writing in the time of the interdict crisis, an anonymous observer claimed that Venetian nobles were "all old enemies of the Church, disciples and academicians of that master Paolo the Servite, of whom it has been publicly said that he has inherited the poison of Luther, the atheism of Sperone of Padua and the impiety of Marsilius of Padua, together with his disciples, the abovementioned patricians".[10] An equally exaggerated account of Sarpi's influence on Venetian nobility appeared in a letter written by the French ambassador Philippe Canaye de Fresnes to Isaac Casaubon in June 1606: "that great friar Paolo . . . is called to the senate, whenever that arduous matter (interdict crisis) is discussed, and all official information that comes to us, comes from his pen".[11] This 'Cabbala of Sarpi', as it was also called, included politicians from the *giovani* and the greatest support to Sarpi came from Nicolò Contarini, Antonio Querini, and Alvise and Alessandro Zorzi. The anonymous writer quoted above claimed that this group could function freely because they enjoyed the protection of doge Leonardo Donà—a statement, which implicitly attributed more power to the doge than was actually the case. It was a common opinion amongst the

9 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 220, note 2: "*noi stimiamo questa escomunica ingiusta, invalida et nulla essendo contraria alla nostra giurisdittione temporale, alla libertà del nostro stato et alla conservattione della facoltà, dell'honore et delle vite d'i nostri sudditi*" (the original source is ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma Ordinaria*, Rg. 15, a. 1606, c. 30).

10 Cozzi 1995, p. 85: "*Tutti inimici antichi della Chiesa, discepoli et accademici di quel maestro Paolo Servita, il quale si dice publicamente che ha ereditato il veleno di Luthero, l'atheismo di M. Spirone da Padova, et l'empietà di Marsilio Patavino, insieme con li suoi discepoli savii grandi nominati*".

11 Cozzi 1979, p. 92: "*magnum illum fratrem Paulum . . . in Senatum, quoties de arduo isto negotio agitur, vocari et quicquid nomine publico hactenus exiit, ipsius manu exaratum fuisse*".

supporters of the papacy that Venetians had been corrupted by "those seducers and atheologians who under the name of theologians and doctors and by disseminating pestiferous doctrines foment the sickness of these patricians".[12] Sarpi was quickly recognised as the republic's leading adviser and, consequently, as the principal instigator of the crisis. This was at least partly due to the fact that in Rome Sarpi was considered a suspicious and influential character already several years prior to the interdict. In 1601 the nuncio Offredo Offredi wrote to cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini (1571–1621) that Sarpi was a man who seemed to "believe in things that one should not believe in" (and not to believe in such things that one was expected to believe in) and belonged to a "school full of errors". What is more, Offredi concluded, Sarpi was "the boss of half the city".[13]

Despite the rivalry and political tension between the *giovani* and the *vecchi*, it seems that Venetian patricians managed to agree on many important issues during the interdict crisis. One such moment of accord took place when the senate unanimously voted for the annulment of the pope's monitory in May 1606. "If the nuncio would have seen them", an anonymous observer wrote, "he would have understood the unity and the resolution of the senate". The same writer also referred to an instance when some patricians wanted to bring up a deliberation in the senate, but after having realized that one of the senators was "discrepant", they decided to postpone the proposal until it was certain that it would not give any stimulus to the clergy who "in vain" argued "that the government of the republic was disunited and that there were many who absolutely wanted to please the pope".[14] Sarpi too claimed that contrary to the expectations fostered in Rome "the senate was most united in deliberations" during this period.[15] Furthermore, when the senate decided to expel the Jesuits in June 1606, Sarpi claimed that "they all found themselves to be in

12 Mariscotti, *Aviso sicuro*, p. 89: "*quei seduttori, & Ateologi, che sotto nome di Teologi, e Dottori, col seminare pestifere dottrine, fomentano l'infermità di quei Signori*".

13 Branchesi 2006, p. 68: "*quel maestro Paulo de Servi, il quale m'è stato messo in concetto d'huomo, che possa creder qualcosa di quel che non si deve, e non creder in qualche altra parte quel che siamo obligati. Anzi che ho sentito mormorare alle volte che egli con alcuni altri faccino una scoletta piena di errori . . . questo huomo è padrone di mezza città*". According to Benzoni 2006, pp. 20–21, Offredi's last remark was correct, because Sarpi did have a strong influence on at least half of the ruling class.

14 ASV, *Consultori in iure*, f. 537, *Relazione*, cc. 3r–3v: "*se il Nontio le havesse vedute havesse conosciuta l'unione, e risolutione del senato*"; c. 48v: "*vanamente . . . che la Republica fosse disunita nel suo governo, e che vi fossero molti, che assolutamente volessero compiacere al Papa*".

15 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, in *SS*, p. 228: "*Et il senato era unitissimo nelle deliberazioni*".

conformity". It has been pointed out, however, that Sarpi exaggerated at this point, since there were ten who voted against, and twenty who abstained.[16]

The interdict conflict lasted one year and ended in April of 1607, following the successful mediation of the French cardinals Joyeuse and Du Perron. However, still in 1611 the nuncio to Venice wrote that there was a great danger of losing the "authority of our Lord", because of the activities of "brother Paolo, Nicolò Contarini, Sebastiano Venier and others alike".[17] While it is true that the *giovani* was a determinedly anticlerical party, Venice was nevertheless a Catholic state and none of its patricians had any interest in breaking from the Church of Rome, no matter how critical they were towards the papacy. Even Nicolò Contarini—one of the most fervently anticlerical patricians—referred to Venice as the "most obedient daughter" of the Church of Rome in his *Historie Venetiane*, which he wrote as the official historian of the republic, but which his peers considered too audacious to be published.[18] Sarpi was keen to see the papacy deprived of all temporal authority, but it is unlikely that the senators shared his eagerness to reform the papacy. Instead of taking the risk of losing their souls in order to save their country, as Gino Benzoni has put it, Venetians chose to preserve both their religion and republic. The pope, however, remained irritated by the confusing implication that Venetians' rigorous dedication to the service of the state was somehow parallel to their piousness and impeccable faith, and that their chosen policy was beneficial not only to the state, but to the church too. From the point of view of Sarpi and his political allies this was only logical. Regardless of what their antagonists may have thought, Sarpi and his friends did not aim to establish a secular and irreligious state—they merely wanted to have a spiritual church, which would have been an integral and subordinate part of their society.[19]

Leonardo Donà's rise to the position of doge in January 1606 engendered uneasiness in the court of Paul V, since Donà was known to be fiercely patriotic

16 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, in *SS*, pp. 251–252: "*si ritrovarono tutti conformi*". For Sarpi's exaggeration, see Da Pozzo's remark in Sarpi, *SS*, p. 251, note 5.

17 Cozzi 1995, p. 107: "*qui si corre un gran pericolo . . . di escludere da questi parti l'auttorità di nostro Signore con l'artificio di fra Paolo, di Nicolò Contarini, di Sebastiano Venier e simili*".

18 Contarini, *Historie Venetiane*, p. 291v: "*la Republica più obediente figliola degli altri, come molte volte in altre occasioni haveva detto sua Santità*". On the reception of Contarini's history, see Cicogna 1830, vol. II, pp. 289–291: the *riformatori dello studio* judged it to contain material too intimately related to the matters of the state and to the "state of the ecclesiastics and the church". On 27 April 1645 the Council of Ten finally decided that the *Historie Venetiane* should not be published, but to be conserved in the 'secret chancellery' (*Cancelleria segreta*).

19 Benzoni 1970, pp. 41, 43–44.

and, if necessary, ready to defy Rome. That Paul V was hostile towards the republic even when he still was cardinal Borghese, is shown in a conversation he allegedly had with Leonardo Donà in the 1580s: the cardinal is supposed to have said that "if I were the pope, I would place Venice under interdict and excommunication", to which Donà, the future doge, replied "and if I were Doge, I would trample your interdict and excommunication under foot".[20] This anecdote captures something of the long-term antagonism between Venice and Rome. Donà in fact had such followers amongst the *giovani*, who held still more radical views on clergy and the papacy. One of the most radical patricians was Agostino Nani, the Venetian ambassador to Rome immediately before the interdict crisis. Nani also was a friend of Sarpi and according to the supporters of the papacy one of those people who were responsible for the clash between Venice and Rome.[21]

The interdict conflict was a momentous political incident and this was understood already by the people who were directly involved in it. Antonio Querini, one of the most influential Venetian patricians, began his history of the conflict by evincing the fundamental importance of the affair to international politics. Had Venice lost its liberty in the aftermath of the interdict, Querini remarked, it would have been "a calamity to our republic, to Italy and to the whole Christian world". In line with many contemporaries, Querini regarded Venice as a vital bastion of liberty, a bastion, which could not be subdued without severe repercussions to the rest of the free world.[22] In a similar fashion, Sarpi's history of the interdict detailed the preoccupation and anxiety the crisis between Venice and Rome caused in different courts of Europe. Even in Spain, Sarpi noted, it was understood that the crisis "was about the interest of all princes, and they praised the constancy of the senate".[23] Sarpi and Querini clearly intended to demonstrate that Venice had finally regained its place at the centre of international politics and that she also deserved such a position, because she had steadfastly fought not only for the rights of all temporal rulers, but also for the purification of the church itself. It was no exaggeration to claim that Venice had returned to the limelight, since pamphlets

20 Lievsay 1973, p. 206 note 39; Salvatorelli 1959, p. 76.

21 Cozzi 1995, p. 79.

22 Querini, *Historia dell' scomunica*, p. 1: "*materia molt' importante . . . calamità alla nostra Republica, all'Italia et al mondo tutto Cristiano*". See also, Querini, *Aviso delle ragioni*, p. 6, where he repeats the idea of Venice as the last bastion against "princes far from the true religion" ("*Prencipi lontani dalla vera Religione*").

23 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 233: "*In Spagna . . . conobbero che si trattava l'interesse de tutti li principi, e lodorono la constanza del senato*".

defending the Venetian cause were avidly read across Europe, from England to the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth.[24]

To fully grasp the interdict crisis and Sarpi's role in it, it is worth reflecting on the way in which it was resolved. Two different formulations on the revocation of the papal censure were written for the senate to choose from. The version written by Sarpi and his allies Giovanni Mocenigo, Nicolò Contarini, Francesco Priuli, Almorò Nani, Sebastiano Venier and Giacomo Correr declared that now that the censures have been abrogated, "everybody has to continue in deference and reverence towards the Holy Apostolic See and His Holiness as it has always been, without any interruption, the intention of ours, our ancestors and the whole of this most Christian and religious republic".[25] To highlight Venice's piety and uninterrupted observance of the Catholic creed was a consistent feature in Sarpi's writings. It is then particularly interesting here that Sarpi's proposal was not elected on the grounds that it was not considered sufficiently deferential. In Corrado Pin's words, it was "eloquent in its dryness" and "a hard formulation" in its "detached tone", whereas the alternative version provided by the moderate senators was "more respectful, deferential, filial towards the Supreme Pontiff". The latter gained 115 votes against the 50 given to Sarpi's outline.[26] This was in fact a defining moment, since it signaled the point at which Sarpi began to lose his influence over the senate as a whole. Venetian politics shifted, taking a more lenient and pro-papal direction, but Sarpi held on to his old position. As Pin has remarked, in the new political situation Sarpi became a "troublesome person", although he was by no means alone in his obstinate anticlericalism: there were senators, most significantly Leonardo Donà and Nicolò Contarini, who, in Contarini's words, regarded the conciliation with Rome as an "appointment of servitude".[27] However, the shift towards more pro-papal politics immediately after the interdict suggests that there was a considerable group of patricians who felt uncomfortable about the clash with Rome throughout the crisis. The relief that followed the absolution

24 Lievsay 1973, *passim*; Kostylo 2009, pp. 171–177.

25 Sarpi, *Consulti*, no. 24, pp. 519–520: "*doverà ognuno continuare nell'ossequio e riverenza verso la Santa Sede Apostolica e la Santità Sua si come fu sempre, senza alcuna interuzione, mente nostra, de' nostri maggiori e di tutta questa cristianissima e religiosissima Republica*".

26 Pin's introduction in, Sarpi, *Consulti*, pp. 518–519: "*eloquentissima nella sua secchezza . . . formula dura, quasi urtante nel tono distaccato . . . più rispettoso, ossequiente, filiale verso il sommo pontefice*".

27 Pin 2001, p. 75: "*In questo nuovo clima il personaggio scomodo era Sarpi*"; Pin 2006b, pp. 346, 348: "*appuntamento di servitù*"; Raines 2006, p. 551, argues, however, that Sarpi remained respected and powerful until 1621, when he was, according to her, 'hated by everyone' (*odiato da tutti*).

and the lifting of the ban gave these senators sufficient impetus to oppose themselves to the powerful anticlerical faction that Sarpi was part of.

It nonetheless seems that Venice's political climate remained heavily influenced by old attitudes and prejudices. In fact, the reconciliation between Rome and the republic changed nothing: Venetians did not revoke the controversial laws, nor did they extradite the two imprisoned clergymen, and the hostility between Venice and Rome continued after the pacification. Sarpi, for instance, remarked in September 1607 that in spite of the simulated friendship "at times signs of deep anger break out".[28] From the point of view of Venice's political and jurisdictional objectives, it was the Venetians who won the conflict. For Sarpi, however, the result was deeply disappointing, because his interests were less in imminent political affairs than in a more lasting ecclesiastical reform. I fully agree with Corrado Pin who concluded that Sarpi the legal adviser may have won, but Sarpi the theologian who "inspired and voiced out ideals of a religious reform" lost his battle.[29]

Sovereignty

The continuous religious controversies of the sixteenth century gave rise to political theories, which were at once disinterested in theological matters and critical of the clergy's claim to temporal power. While this tendency indirectly accelerated the process of secularisation, those behind it, theorists and politicians alike, usually remained pious Christians who considered their own political objectives perfectly congruous with the will of God. This apparent harmony between politics and piety was based on the assumption that temporal rulers were in fact God's representatives or 'lieutenants' on earth. In keeping with this theory it has been argued that in Venice obedience to state was considered equal to obedience to the will of God.[30]

Early-modern political though was deeply influenced by medieval political philosophy. One of the most decisive moments in this respect was the publication of the first complete Latin translation by William of Moerbeke of the Aristotle's *Politics* in 1260. The book quickly attracted the attention of scholars such as Thomas Aquinas who commented on it in his *De regno* and *Summa theologiae* already in the 1260's. Aquinas was the first scholastic commentator

28 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, p. 3.

29 Pin 2006b, p. 350: "*Il canonista e consultore in iure Sarpi . . . usciva vincente . . . il teologo che aveva ispirato e dato voce agli ideali di riforma religiosa . . . usciva, di fatto, sconfitto*".

30 Muir 1981, p. 16.

on the *Politics*, but by no means the last: he was followed by Remigio de'Girolami (*De bono pacis*), Henry of Rimini (*Tractatus de quottuor virtutibus cardinalibus*), Giles of Rome (*De regimine principum*) and Marsilius of Padua (*Defensor pacis*). The availability of Aristotle's *Politics* gave a new impetus to the late medieval discussion on political questions and it became characteristic of the political theorists of the time to adopt Aristotle's view of man as a 'political animal', as Aquinas did in his *De regno*: "but man is by nature a social and political animal, who lives in a community".[31] While this might seem a simplistic interpretation of man, it nevertheless proved difficult to define what exactly did civil society or 'living in a community' mean. One of the key problems in this context was the nature and locus of sovereign power.

The first prominent theorist of sovereignty in the early-modern period was Jean Bodin.[32] Despite the fact that Bodin's magnum opus was titled *Six livres de la république*, it was not a treatise on the republican form of government. Here the 'republic' was simply a synonym of *respublica*; public affairs. This was not an unusual way to employ the term and Sarpi too often wrote about 'republic' when he in fact referred to an entity, which we would label a 'state'. This was also the case with Paolo Paruta, the Venetian patrician who published his republican treatise *Della perfettione della vita politica* in 1579. However, a clear sign that Sarpi belonged to a different era, or to a different tradition of political thought than Paruta appears in the fact that we can frequently find the concept '*principe*' in his *consulti* to replace the 'state' or the more traditional 'republic'.[33] Sarpi's choice of words indicates an absolutistic or monarchical turn in the political language in the early seventeenth-century Venice, although it should be stressed that with the 'prince' Sarpi did not refer only to the doge, but to the whole of the Venetian government.

In his *Six livres de la république* Bodin defined the "maiestie or soveraigntie" as the "most high, absolute, and perpetuall power over the citisens and subiects in a Commonweale". He continued that "nothing upon earth is greater or higher, next unto God, than the maiestie of kings and souveraigne princes" who should not be thought of otherwise than as "lieutenants of the most mightie

31 Skinner 1988, pp. 395–396; Aquinas, *Political writings*, pp. 5–6, and footnote 17: "*naturale autem est homini ut sit animal sociale et politicum, in multitude vivens*".

32 It should be mentioned, however, that Bodin was not the first to write about sovereignty. As pointed out by Tierney 1982, p. 30, the revival of Roman and canon law in the twelfth century resulted in a doctrine of sovereignty or "supreme jurisdiction" amongst the supporters of papal monarchy. See also, Pennington 1993, pp. 276–283, who emphasizes Bodin's debt to medieval jurists.

33 Chabod 1967, pp. 644–645, 647.

and immortal God".[34] Bodin's theory of sovereignty was extremely influential. Indeed, it became commonplace amongst those Italian writers who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries endorsed absolutistic princely rule to regard the ruler as a lieutenant, vicar or minister of God.[35] Sarpi too claimed that only God was superior to a prince in temporal matters, and, quoting from S. Paul's letter to the Romans, he argued that the prince was a "minister of God".[36] While this suggests that Sarpi's concept of sovereignty had more in common with St Paul than Bodin, it is nevertheless likely that Sarpi was familiar with Bodin's work. In fact, Corrado Vivanti has noted that Sarpi read not only Pierre Charron, Étienne Pasquier (1529–1615) and Guillaume Du Vair (1556–1621), but also Bodin, and Gaetano Cozzi has suggested that some of Sarpi's writings reveal his reading of the *De la république*.[37] Sarpi may have chosen not to refer to Bodin in his writings simply because his works were placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and, instead, preferred to quote St. Paul's definition of a secular ruler.[38] Indeed, who should better replace a condemned author than one of the leading saints of the Christian church?

In certain ways Sarpi went much further than Bodin in his support for absolutism. According to Bodin the sovereign was not "in any sort subiect to the commaund of another", not even to his own laws. However, "as for the lawes of God and nature, all princes and people of the world are unto them subiect" and, Bodin continued, the contract between ruler and subject is "mutual" and binds both parties.[39] Although the sovereign was not bound to observe his own laws "of necessitie", he was obliged to do this "of courtesie", because it contributed effectively to "the honour and obedience of the subiects towards their prince". Should the ruler have infringed his own laws, he would have risked

34 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. I, chap. VIII, p. 84; chap. X, p. 153.

35 De Mattei 1958, p. 326. Antonio Possevino observed that "Bodin's writings" were "worn out in many hands", in Possevino, *Iudicium*, p. 87: "*scriptisque Bodini, qui multorum manibus teritur*".

36 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 488: "*Dio, il quale solo nel governo temporale è superior del principe . . .* (*principe*) *è un ministro di Dio*".

37 Vivanti 2005, p. 52; Cozzi 1969, p. 482.

38 In 1587 Vincenzo Buonanno, Bellarmine's collaborator in the *Congregazione dell'Index*, added Bodin's name to the list of writers "of whom there remained doubt whether they were heretics or not". The Congregation of the Saint Office denied Giacomo Soranzo, a Venetian patrician, permission to read the *Six livres de la République* and the *Methodus* in 1592, and, finally, in the following year Bodin's works were placed on the *Index*. For this, see Baldini 2001, p. 84; Firpo 1950, p. 156.

39 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. I, chap. VIII, pp. 91–93.

losing the respect of his subjects.[40] In contrast, Sarpi disregarded the idea that sovereigns should pay attention to their subjects' rights, opinions or role in the process of governing:

> He who has the majesty commands everyone and no one can command him . . . he is not subject to any human law whatsoever, but he even commands all the laws . . . the king who is sovereign does not command according to laws, but (he commands) the laws themselves, and remains obliged only to God and his (own) conscience. One should not say that this is to make (the power) limitless, since there is no stronger bond . . . than the conscience and the fear of God; and to add a further bond to this is nothing but adding an atom to infinity . . . the prince is held to govern well, but he is not obliged to people to do so, but to God.[41]

While Bodin held that there was a mutually binding contract between a ruler and his subjects, and that the ruler was obliged to observe his own laws, Sarpi freed the ruler not only from all human laws, but also from all possible bonds between him and his subjects. The ruler was therefore responsible only to God and his own conscience, which Sarpi seems to have identified with God's will. Sarpi expressed his idea of the sovereign ruler as *legibus solutus* not only in his *Della potestà de' principi*—an unfinished work, which Sarpi started to write at some point after 1609—but also, as pointed out by Corrado Pin, in the *consulti* that he wrote for the senate of Venice.[42] At least in the context of the interdict crisis, however, Sarpi was keen to specify that the authority of the Venetian government was not based on arbitrary, but rational will of the sovereign. The purpose of this specification was to protect Venice from being labeled as a tyranny, not to suggest that the authority of secular rulers should be limited

40 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. I, chap. VIII, pp. 103–104.

41 Sarpi, *Della potestà de'prencipi*, p. 52: "*Chi ha la maestà commanda a tutti e nessuno può commandar a lui . . . non è soggetta a nessuna legge umana, sia qual si voglia, ma egli commanda eziandio a tutte le leggi . . . Il re che è sovrano non commanda secondo le leggi ma alle leggi stesse, resta ubligato solo a Dio e alla sua consienzia. Né dica alcuno che questo sia far un sfrenato, ché non vi è così forte legame . . . che la consienza e il timor divino; e l'aggionger altro legame a questo non è aggionger altro che un atomo all'infinito . . . è tenuto il Prencipe governar bene, ma non ha obligazione di ciò al popolo, ma a Dio*".

42 Pin 2006a, p. 117. See *ibid*., pp. 96–97: in august 1609 Sarpi wrote to the ducal secretary Agostino Dolce that he wanted to "put together not only all the good laws with which a dominion is governed peacefully", but also the justifications for such laws ("*Ho gran desiderio non solo di metter insieme tutti li buoni instituti per quali un dominio vien governato con quiete . . . ma ancora li fondamenti e raggioni con quali essi instituti si sostentano*").

by some other means than divine law.[43] In line with Sarpi's understanding of sovereignty, Micanzio argued that the sovereign should observe the principles of "equity and justice", although he was only responsible to God, not to the people who "are obliged to absolute obedience". Furthermore, the sovereign can "command whatever he wants, because his arbitration is law" and, Micanzio insisted, this did not amount to tyranny.[44]

There was a relatively quick shift in the political language of Venetian writers from republicanism and the concept of mixed government to the absolutistic rhetoric of the anticlerical *giovani*. This shift took place during those twenty-seven years that separated Paolo Paruta's *Della perfettione della vita politica* (1579) and the outset of the interdict crisis in 1606. In his *Della perfettione della vita politica* (which was published only three years after Bodin's *De la République*) Paruta argued that a ruler should not diverge from the laws which he has made. "His virtuous action", Paruta wrote, did not "originate from (human) law", to which he was "not subject". If a sovereign observed his own law, it was merely because he knew that this was the best thing to do. Natural law was the "true law" of a prince and he had to obey it just as the subjects obeyed his laws. Furthermore, he had to adapt his own laws to the principles of natural law. According to Paruta God was the "true judge" of "every action" of the ruler who in turn was a "minister deputed by that Supreme king of all kings".[45] While the reference to a prince as God's minister who was not

43 In one of his *consulti* from the interdict period Sarpi assessed a pro-Venetian treatise by Agostino del Bene who soon afterwards was nominated a legal adviser to the senate. While recommending the publication of the treatise, Sarpi nevertheless advised Del Bene to reformulate a sentence which suggested that the sovereign's authority was arbitrary. Sarpi, *Consulti*, no. 22, pp. 498–499: "*se piacesse all'eccellentissimo auttore metter qualche limitazione che significasse una volontà raggionevole e non arbitraria, leverebbe forsi la fatiga alli dettrattori di opporsi con dire che si vogli formare un tiranno, dandoli potestà di commandare* pro libito".

44 Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 50, p. 786: "(*principe assoluto*) *ha ben obligo a Dio et a se medesimo di servar equità, giustizia, ma non ha obligo colli sudditi, ma questi sono obligati ad una obedienza assoluta. Se errarà, è tenuto a Dio, non ad altro . . . così il principe in rigore assoluto può commandar ciò che vuole, che 'l suo arbitrio è legge. Ma che? È questo farlo tiranno?*".

45 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 229: "*dico ben essere ufficio d'uomo savio e di buon prencipe, non si dipartire da quelli ordini ch'egli ha instituiti nella città . . . l'operazione virtuosa in lui non ha origine dalla legge, alla cui ubbidienza non è soggetto; ma se egli opera ciò che la legge dispone, ciò avviene perchè la via del bene è una sola . . . ma la vera legge del prencipe è la legge della natura, la quale è sopra lui, e deve essere scorta nell'ordinare le leggi particolari; avendo egli tale obbligo di ubbidire a questa, rispetto a Dio vero giudice d'ogni sua operazione, quale hanno i sudditi della legge scritta, per rispetto al prencipe, che è quasi certo ministro deputato da quel Sommo re di tutti i re*".

subject to human law suggests that Paruta was familiar with Bodin's theory of sovereignty, it should be stressed that he was not an advocate of absolutism. More to the point, he did not believe that rulers were above the law as we can judge from his conclusion that it was necessary to restrain "the authority of a magistrate with the power of another (magistrate)", as was the case in a republic like Venice, which was governed by "the most perfect form of mixed government".[46] Whereas in Paruta's work the absolutistic concept of power was merely an innuendo that was ultimately rejected, in the writings of Sarpi and, for instance, Antonio Querini it was already a fully developed and accepted political theory.

Sarpi's early *consulti* show that he adhered to absolutism already in the beginning of his career as the senate's adviser. Therefore, his nomination is illustrative of the political climate in early seventeenth-century Venice: the leading senators must have been familiar with Sarpi's political views already prior to the nomination and thus confident that the latter would write in such a manner, which would support their own political views. For example, in one of his first *consulti* Sarpi aimed to vindicate temporal jurisdiction's authority over the clergy and the way in which he did this left no room for doubt as far as the absolutistic tenor of his rhetoric was concerned. "Because a well ordered republic is one", Sarpi declared, "it must be governed by one supreme power, to which all things are subordinated".[47] In a later *consulto* Sarpi specified that this power was "natural", given to the republic by God, and it could not be "restricted or limited by any creature", an idea, which he reiterated in his *Della potestà de' principi*: "no man can interfere in the authority of the kings, and this is because they have it directly from God".[48]

The theory of divine right of kings—according to which the power of all secular rulers came from God—had its roots deep in the medieval concept of royal theocracy.[49] In early seventeenth century the argument about the divine

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46 Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 392: "*è pericolo che un prencipe, che è solo nell'imperio, non contento di comandare per la legge, voglia comandare alla legge stessa . . . Ma nella repubblica degli ottimati . . . estimasi . . . il temperamento dell'autorità dell'un magistrato co'l potere dell'altro*"; p. 395: "*questa perfettissima forma di republica mista*". For Paruta's admiration for the mixed government of Venice, see *ibid*., pp. 397–398.

47 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 479: "*essendo la bene ordinata republica una, è necessario che sia governata da una suprema potestà, alla quale ogni cosa sia soggetta*".

48 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 18 October 1618, f. 13, c. 214v: "*potestà naturale, data da Dio alla Rep., la quale non può esser ristretta, ò limitata da alcuna creatura*"; Sarpi, *Della potestà de'prencipi*, p. 51: "*nessun uomo può metter mano nell'auttorità delli re, qual è perché l'hanno da Dio immediatamente*".

49 Tierney 1997, p. 289.

origin and justification of royal power had already become a commonplace amongst those political thinkers who, like Sarpi, supported temporal rulers' authority against that of the church and the papacy. Whereas in France and England it was common among the proponents of divine right theory to argue that the power came *directly* from God, in Italy this was rare (it was more common to argue that the power came *indirectly* from God) and usually endorsed by radical writers such as Sarpi—writers who were patently anticlerical and often accused of heresy.[50] "In temporal matters absolute princes are subjects to no one but God", Sarpi argued and added "from whom their power comes directly".[51] It is hardly surprising that Sarpi adopted the more radical theory of the direct descent of power, because to claim that the sovereign's power came from God only indirectly entailed a transfer of power to the ruler from the people or from the pope, an argument, which offered the pope leeway to interfere in temporal affairs. This explains the popularity of the more radical version of the divine right theory in non-Catholic kingdoms such as the England of James I. Sarpi understood that the question of whether temporal power came from God directly or indirectly was anything but inconsequential: it was, according to him, "about the first and principal foundation of every state".[52] Micanzio shared Sarpi's opinion about this matter. In 1610 he argued in a sermon that "temporal and regal power depends immediately on God" and, more precisely, that "it is not a man, who can give it", but "temporal reigns come immediately from God".[53]

In his *Della potestà de' prencipi* Sarpi attacked Bellarmine's theory, according to which political power was "in multitude", while ecclesiastical power was in one, namely, in the pope. Furthermore, Sarpi explained that in Bellarmine's view political power was "universally" speaking *de iure divino*, but when considered "particularly", it was *de iure gentium*. This meant that the power of a prince came from God indirectly, through human mediation, as was true for everything that was based on the law of nations. According to Bellarmine, God first gave temporal power to the people or to his "general vicar", who could then

50 De Mattei 1958, p. 330.

51 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 158: "*Nelle cose temporali li principi assoluti non sono soggetti ad altrui che a Dio, dal quale viene immediatamente la lor potesta*".

52 Sarpi, *Della potestà de'prencipi*, p. 51: "*quando si disputa se l'auttorità regia sia da Dio mediatamente o immediate, non . . . si disputa delle umbre del cavallo, ma del primo e principal fondamento d'ogni stato*".

53 I quote from Rein 1904, p. 224: "*La potestà laica et Regia dipende immediatamente da Dio, et non è huomo, che la possa dare . . . Li Regni temporali sono immediatamente da Dio*". These lines were censored by the inquisition.

transfer and change that power. Sarpi remarked with sarcasm that Bellarmine did not invest the people with the supreme power simply out of charity, but because this enabled the pope to "deprive princes of their power".[54] Later on Sarpi rejected the idea that sovereign power could ever derive from positive law or from anything else than divine law. If the sovereign governed by the virtue of human law, Sarpi asked, who had made that law? If the sovereign himself had made the law, then he necessarily ruled already prior to the existence of the law which gave him the power to rule. If the law was made by the people, then the sovereignty was in the people, not in the ruler. But where did the power of the people come from? To claim that it was of human origin led back to the original problem, Sarpi wrote: either the people had the power to govern already before they made the law which gave them the power to govern, or, if the law was made by somebody else, then that somebody else was the real sovereign. From this Sarpi concluded that "we necessarily arrive at one who rules *iure divino*, and this in my opinion is the only sovereign".[55]

In contrast to Sarpi, Ockham attacked not only the papal *plenitudo potestatis*, but also the general idea of absolute power: "it conflicts with the best regime", he maintained, "that the ruler should have the fullness of power". To allow the ruler to impose on his subjects anything that would not violate natural or divine law, would turn all the subjects into "his slaves in the strictest sense of the term", which, Ockham concluded, was against "the best regime".[56] Sarpi criticized the papal *plenitudo potestatis*, or *totatus*, but at the same time distanced himself from Ockham's position in that he insisted on the absoluteness of the power of secular rulers. This seems to have been the political attitude of the leading Venetian patricians during the first decade of the seventeenth-century. Antonio Querini, for example, complained that temporal

54 Sarpi, *Della potestà de'prencipi*, p. 49: "*la politica è nella moltitudine, l'ecclesiastica in uno solo, cioè il papa . . . la politica in universale è* de iure divino, *in particolare è* de iure gentium, *dove l'ecclesiastica è in tutti li modi* de iure divino *e immediate da Dio*", p. 50: "*sì che non era carità verso li popoli il darli potestà sopra il re, ma . . . che il papa possi levare l'auttorità alli prencipi*".

55 Sarpi, *Della potestà de'prencipi*, p. 60: "*Se domina per legge umana, chi ha fatto quella legge? Egli o il suo regno? Se egli l'ha fatta, adonque dominava prima, e non può aver acquistato il publico governo per quella legge; se per quella legge, l'ha fatto il popolo, adonque non è colui il sovrano, ma il popolo che gli ha dato quella legge . . . Ora di quel popolo parlo: egli è soprano,* quo iure*? Se tu dici: umano; t'addimando: chi ha fatto quella legge? Se egli no, perché bisogna che dominasse prima che farla, adonque l'ha fatto un altro, e per consequente quell'altro sarà il soprano; e così farà bisogno che per necessità noi veniamo ad uno che domini* iure divino*, e questo io dico che solo è il soprano*".

56 Ockham, *A letter to the friars minor*, pp. 318–319.

princes found it increasingly difficult to justify the legitimacy of their power, because of the usurpation exercised by the church authorities. Yet, he insisted that this power had been "conceded to them immediately by God, the supreme giver of dominions".[57] Querini also referred to the republic of Venice as a "free and independent prince", whose power came "immediately from God", and who was an "absolute patron" in all temporal matters.[58] In a similar vein, in his *Due discorsi sopra la liberta ecclesiastica* (1606) Simone Sardi—pseudonym for the Paduan historian Giovanni Battista Leoni (1542–1613)—argued that Venice was a "great, absolute, free, and always independent prince", capable of making laws without paying heed to no one but God.[59] Furthermore, Agostino Nani, the Venetian ambassador to Rome, declared to the pope on the eve of the interdict crisis that "Venetians, who were born in freedom, were not responsible for their operations to no one except God, the only superior to the doge in temporal matters".[60] Leonardo Donà in turn was reported to have spoken to the vicar of the patriarch of Venice in a tone, which brimmed with absolutistic rhetoric. Donà asked the vicar how much he respected the prince of Venice, to which the vicar replied that he respected the prince very much, just as he respected the church. This was clearly not enough for Donà who retorted: "what? You say that you respect this prince a lot? I say that he is everything, and as such he has to be respected and obeyed, while all the others are supplementary".[61] This quotation suggests that Venetians' absolutistic rhetoric was often intensified by their fear of and hostility towards the authority of the church.

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57 Querini, *Historia dell' scomunica*, p. 9v: "*che dal supremo datore degl' Imperij Iddio è loro immediatamente stato conceduto*".

58 Querini, *Historia dell' scomunica*, pp. 3v: "*Principe libero et independente*", 18v: "*quella podestà concessa imediatamente da Dio a questa Republica, et a ogni principe temporale*", 20: "*sopra materia temporale . . . il Principe è assolutamente patrone*".

59 Sardi, *Due discorsi sopra la liberta ecclesiastica*, p. 22: "*questo tutto è fatto dalla Republica come Prencipe grande, assoluto, libero, e sempre independente, a cui giuridicamente appartiene senza alcun' altra relation o riguardo che di Dio, il formar quelle leggi*". For Sardi's true identity, see Bouwsma 1968, p. 387 note 226. Interestingly, Giuseppe Mazzini believed that Sardi's treatise was in fact sketched by Sarpi (Mazzini 1838, p. 169), which is indicative of the attitude expressed in Sardi's book.

60 I quote from Salvatorelli 1959, p. 78, note 15: "*I veneziani nati in libertà non erano tenuti a render conto delle operazioni loro se non al Signore Iddio unico superiore al doge nelle cose temporali*".

61 I quote from Grendler 1977, p. 269: "*Come? Voi disse di riconoscer il principe qui per molto? Io dico che egli è il tutto, et che per il tutto bisogna riconoscerlo, et obedirlo, et che gli altri tutti sono accessori*".

That Sarpi was a champion of absolutism has been acknowledged by a number of scholars.[62] It should be stressed, however, that absolutism is understood broadly here: not as a support for monarchic rule, but as a set of principles, according to which rulers were accountable to God alone, their commands were to be obeyed, and, thirdly, they were not to be resisted by their subjects.[63] These principles make absolutism a theory applicable to such political writers who lived in republics and wrote in support of republican governments. More to the point, they were arguments, which Sarpi endorsed in his writings. This aspect of Sarpi's political thought was no doubt inspired by Jean Bodin and Gallican writers such as Jacques Gillot. At the same time, the French read Sarpi. He was popular amongst the French *politiques*, Gallicans and freethinkers, and for example the sceptic thinker and versatile writer François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672) was influenced by Sarpi's writings.[64] La Mothe Le Vayer was a "*libertin erudit*", follower of Montaigne and Charron and known both as "the Christian sceptic" and "the Epicurean unbeliever" in whose view nature was a manifestation of God's will and true Christianity was achieved through scepticism—the suspension of judgment on all matters—because it was "respectful towards heaven and submissive to faith".[65] While he was primarily indebted to Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne and Charron, his attitude (especially his scepticism and reluctance to speculate about divine matters) did bear resemblance to Sarpi's intellectual outlook.

Sarpi's correspondence with Gallicans such as Jacques Gillot testifies to their mutual interest in and adoption of the principles of absolutism. "The majesty does not want to share the duties", Sarpi wrote to Gillot, "he considers them all his own responsibilities". Furthermore, Sarpi concluded that "nothing is greater than the king, nothing is equal to him".[66] Gillot, who was an adviser to the parliament of Paris, argued in his *Le Caton François au Roy* (1614) that a subject is obliged to "love and obey his prince", while the "majesty has the absolute power in his state" and can therefore "give such a law as he pleases

62 See, for example De Mattei 1958, pp. 330–331, Wootton 1983, pp. 5, 66–68 and Sommerville 1991, p. 349.

63 I take this definition of absolutism from Sommerville 1991, p. 348.

64 Charbonnel 1919, pp. 57–58: "*Le Vayer, il s'etait imprégné de la lecture de ce Machiavel perfectionné, le célèbre Fra Paolo*". Charbonnel's interpretation of Sarpi was confused, because he mistakenly believed that Sarpi had written the book titled "*Prince, ou conseiles a la seigneurie de Venise sur la maniere de governer ses sujets du Levant*" (*ibid.*, p. 424, note 1).

65 Popkin 1979, pp. 87, 90–93.

66 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, p. 141: *Uno verbo, maiestas non vult mutuas operas, illas vult omnes subiectas, nihil oportet rege maius, nihil regi par*".

to his people".[67] In contrast to Sarpi, however, Gillot placed clear restrictions on the sovereign's absolute power. In the first place, Gillot argued that only those actions of a prince are "legitimate" which aim at virtue and public good; secondly, the king was "obliged to follow the resolutions made in the assemblies of the three estates" (assemblies, however, were convoked by the king); thirdly, the highest magistrates could resist those royal edicts which were considered "unbalanced".[68] While Sarpi's political theory eschewed any justification of resistance against a temporal sovereign, Gillot referred to the highest magistrates with the power to resist royal edicts as "*officiers souverains*", which suggests that he located some of the sovereign power in them. However, it is likely that he added this caveat to sovereign power because the treatise was addressed to Louis XIII who was only four years old at the time Gillot wrote the text.

While Sarpi discussed the nature of sovereign power in his correspondence with Gillot, his ideas were no doubt influenced by Jean Bodin's theory of sovereignty. Both Sarpi and Bodin maintained that one of the most crucial 'marks' of sovereignty was the inalienable right to make laws. According to Bodin "the first and chiefe marke of a soveraigne prince" was the "power to give lawes to all his subiects" and to do this "without consent of any other greater, equall, or lesser than himselfe". Sarpi in turn argued that secular princes have "the power to make laws over temporal matters" and, furthermore, they have this power *iure divino* and it "cannot be revoked by anything human".[69] He identified the very essence of sovereignty with the power to make laws and with independence from any sort of legislation of another sovereign power:

> No injury penetrates deeper in the essence of princedom, than the one, in which his majesty, that is, the sovereignty, would be limited and submitted under the law of another. As much is a prince the one who possesses a large part of the world, as the one, who possesses a small part;

67 Gillot, *Le Caton François au Roy*, p. 27: "*La mesme obligation est au suject d'aymer son Prince, & luy obeïr*"; p. 30: "*vostre Majesté ait pouvoir absolu dans son Estat, & qu'il donne la loy telle qu'il veut ä son peuple*".

68 Gillot, *Le Caton François au Roy*, pp. 5–6: "*Toute action és Princes n'est pas legitime: celle là seule l'est, qui a la vertu pour but, & le bien & soulagement de leur peuples*"; p. 57: "*vostre Maiesté est encores obligee . . . a suivre les resolutions qui sont prises ès assemblees des trois Estats de vostre Royaume legitimement convoquez*"; p. 60: "*Il y a encores, Sire, une servitude, a laquelle V. M. se doit ranger . . . & celle-là consiste és iustes refus que vos officiers souverains peuvent faire de vos edicts, non poisez a la balance*".

69 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. I, chap. X, p. 159; *SS*, p. 193: "*li prencipi secolari hanno per lege divina, a quale nissuna umana può derogare, la potestà di far leggi sopra le cose temporali*".

> Romulus was not in a lesser extent a prince than Trajan . . . The one who removes a part of the state of a prince, makes him a minor prince, but leaves him still a prince. The one who imposes laws on him and wants to compel him, even though he would possess the whole of Asia, deprives him of the essence of being a prince.[70]

Thus for Sarpi the size of the territory under the dominion of a prince had no consequences whatsoever for his authority and sovereignty. He proudly argued that the rights of Venice as a sovereign state were equal to those of any such sovereign state, which consisted of a larger territory. The size of the territory was deemed irrelevant already by Contarini and Paruta, as discussed here in chapter two. Both of them argued that the perfection of a state was not so much related to the size of its territory, as to the good laws and institutions of its government.[71] However, while Contarini and Paruta were more interested in formulating republican interpretations of good government, Sarpi focused on analysing the nature of power and sovereignty. This was a natural choice for him, given that he wrote in a period when Venice's sovereignty was being challenged by Rome. Indeed, in Sarpi's view Paul V made an attempt to "alter the government of the republic" during the interdict crisis. The pope tried to interfere in the legislation of the republic and to intrude on the "constitution of her laws, which is precisely the soul of the civil government".[72]

While Sarpi denied the pope any power to interfere in temporal legislation, he had no such qualms about secular rulers having authority in ecclesiastical matters. This was the case when, in 1605, the senate of Venice made the law, which forbade the laity to alienate their property to the clergy. Paul V criticized the Venetians for having violated the church's right to receive property from the laity, but Sarpi denied the accusation and argued, instead, that the church's liberty had not been offended, but instead, "for the common good the possession has been restricted for the laity". What is more, he argued that "by the faculty of his sovereign power" the prince of Venice had "given a law" to

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70 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 472: "*nissuna ingiuria penetra più nell'intimo di un principato, quanto che la maestà sua, la sopranità cioè, sii limitata e sii soggieta a legi d'altrui. Tanto è principe chi possede molta come poca parte del mondo; né Romolo fu manco principe che Traiano . . . Chi leva una parte dello stato al principe, lo fa principe minore, ma lo lascia principe: chi li impone legi e lo vuole obligare, se bene possedesse un' Asia intiera, lo priva della essenza di principe*".

71 Contarini, *Republica*, p. 10; Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, p. 2.

72 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, pp. 51–52: "*alterare il governo della republica . . . mentre che vuol metter mano nella constitutione delle leggi di lei, che è l'anima appunto del governo civile*".

his subjects "as regards the ways in which they can dispose their property" and this was something that "the prince can do by natural law".[73] Sarpi was even more forthright on this point in his history of the interdict: "the prince has all the power over the people and their property".[74] This prompted Hernando della Bastida to argue that Sarpi's claim that the "prince is more the owner and master of individuals' possessions than they themselves are" was enough to "impose on the vassals of Venice a harder and heavier yoke than has ever been imposed on any nation by any tyrant of Scythia".[75] While Della Bastida's polemic style might undermine his argument, it should be acknowledged that Sarpi's view about the ruler's right to dispose of his subjects' property did in fact invest the sovereign with much greater power than for example Bodin's concept of sovereignty did.[76]

As far as early-modern political thought is concerned Sarpi's denial of private ownership and his assignment of all possessions to the sovereign was a radical position, but if we look at his immediate historical context, it seems that his point of view was shared at least by some of the Venetian patricians. Antonio Querini, for example, argued in his *Aviso delle ragioni della serenissima Republica di Venetia* (1606) that the "prince" was a "greater master of the lives and possessions of subjects" than "the private individual" himself.[77] This quotation shows how thoroughly even the most influential stratum of Venetian nobility was imbued with absolutistic ideology. What is more, Querini's *Aviso* was widely read and, according to the nineteenth-century Venetian erudite Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, of all the treatises written during and about the interdict crisis, Querini's was the "most accepted by the Venetians, and, according to the common opinion of the learned of the day, the most efficacious

73 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 434: "*per il ben publico è stato ristretto il dominio al laico: laonde accidentalmente la chiesa ha meno di quello che aveva, e pertanto non se gli fa ingiuria . . . per la facultà della sua potestà suprana ha dato legge alli privati in che modo possino disponere delli suoi stabili: il che il principe può far per legge di natura*".

74 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 291: "*il principe ha ogni potestà sopra le persone e beni loro*".

75 Della Bastida, *Antidoto*, p. 172: "*Mette Fra Paolo nel suo libro come primo principio, che il Prencipe è più padrone, e più Signore delle robbe de' particolari, che essi medesimi. Cosa, che fosse vera, com'è falsissima, bastaria ad imporre a vassalli di Venetia il più duro, & grave giogo, che giamai s'imponesse a veruna natione da qualsivoglia Tiranno di Scithia*".

76 Pennington 1993, pp. 281, 283, notes that Bodin concurred with medieval jurists such as Cinus, Panormitanus, Baldus and Bartolus who argued that "the prince could not arbitrarily expropriate the goods of private citizens".

77 Querini, *Aviso delle ragioni della serenissima Republica di Venetia*, p. 17: "*Prencipe più patrone della vita, & della robba de'sudditi di quello, che sia la persona privata*".

to persuade".[78] If we consider the entirety of Sarpi's literary work, however, it is clear that his writings surpassed those of Querini in terms of their reach and impact.

The absolutistic tone of the political rhetoric of Sarpi and the Venetian nobility was no doubt intensified by the pope's eagerness to test Venice's sovereignty. In addition to challenging the republic's legislation and political decisions Rome questioned Venice's right to govern such places as Ceneda, the small town and diocese situated in its territory. The question of Ceneda prompted Sarpi to write four substantial *consulti*, in which he defended Venice's "possession of the aforesaid sovereignty".[79] "The pope claims", Sarpi wrote elsewhere, "that a city of this state, called Ceneda, is his", although "it has always been possessed by the *Signoria*".[80] Since Ceneda was a diocese, Sarpi studied the past activities of its bishops and found a "notable offense to the most serene republic sovereign prince" (sic: *Serenissima Republica principe soprano*). This was an innovation introduced in 1586 by the new bishop who, instead of entitling himself the bishop and count of Ceneda, as his predecessors had done, began to name himself the bishop and prince of Ceneda. This created two problems for the republic: in the first place, the title 'count' signified a vassal who had a superior, whereas the 'prince' was more ambiguous, because it could refer both to the vassal and the superior; secondly, a subject could change his title only with the permission of his superior, and because the bishop had made the alteration without the permission of the government of Venice, he had effectively refused to acknowledge Venice as his superior. While some years later another bishop renounced the title 'prince', he nevertheless did not restore the 'count' but merely called himself the bishop of Ceneda. Sarpi maintained that this too was offensive, not only because a subject could not alter his title by himself, but also because he was supposed to be bishop in spiritual and a count in temporal matters, and, respectively, a subject of the

78 Cicogna 1830, vol. II, p. 279: "*fu la più accetta a' Veneziani, e la più efficace, a comun sentimento de' dotti di allora, per persuadere*". See also, *ibid*., p. 281, where Cicogna quotes Joseph Justus Scaliger's letter to Isaac Casaubon: "*Puto me omnia scripta Venetorum legisse. In illis auctoribus tres palmam obtinent: Paulus Servita, Marsilius Neopolitanus, Antonius Quirinus patricius venetus*" ("I believe I have read all the writings of the Venetians. Of these authors three hold the first place: Paolo Sarpi, Giovanni Marsilio, Antonio Querini, Venetian patrician").

79 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 497: "*la verità è che la possessione della suddetta sopranità si ritrova appresso la Serenità vostra*".

80 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, to Groslot de l'Isle, 7 June 1611, p. 178: "*Il papa pretende che sia sua una città di questo stato, chiamata Ceneda . . . sempre è stata possessa dalla Signoria*".

pope in the former and a subject of Venice in the latter. In Sarpi's view the fact that the bishop excluded the 'count' from his title suggested that he denied his subjection to Venice's temporal authority.[81]

In December 1600 Clement VIII (1592–1605) published a letter in which he claimed that Ceneda was under the rule of the bishop *pleno iure*, meaning that also the appeals pertaining to temporal matters were to be delivered to the bishop instead of the temporal magistrates. After two years of futile negotiations the senate of Venice finally published a proclamation, which rejected the letter and announced that anyone who observed its contents would be punished as a "disturber of the superiority (*superiorità*) of the republic". In 1609, however, a statute was published in Ceneda containing two writings in which the superiority of the republic was, to quote Sarpi, "outrageously violated" (*è lesa enormissimamente*). The first tract proclaimed that no citizen of Ceneda could appeal to any other but an ecclesiastical court. The other treatise claimed that the republic of Venice had originally been a vassal of the bishop.[82] Needless to say, Sarpi rejected both claims and argued that Venice had taken Ceneda under her protection during the fourteenth century.[83] The theme of protection had already been discussed by Bodin who denied that the act of protecting would bring along "any subiection of him that is in protection" and, moreover, argued that a sovereign prince who placed himself under the protection of another sovereign ruler did not lose his status, but, instead, "continueth still a soveraigne, and not a subiect".[84] In contrast to this, Sarpi emphasized inequality in the act of protection and concluded that "the union of unequal (parties) turns into protection and finally into subjection".[85] It is nevertheless clear that Sarpi needed more than this remark about the nature of protection to justify Venice's sovereign rule over Ceneda. He observed anxiously that in the past seven years the government of Venice had not made a single "act of superiority" (*atto di superiorità*) with regard to its dominion over the diocese and specified three possible ways of proceeding. The first was to do nothing and let the time go by, trusting in the "clarity and validity of the title". Sapi clearly

81 Sarpi, *Opere*, pp. 503–504.

82 Sarpi, *Opere*, pp. 514, 516–517.

83 Sarpi, *Opere*, pp. 527–528.

84 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. I, chap. VII, pp. 69, 72. Bodin claimed that he was the first person to write about the theme of protection. According to Cozzi, in Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 483, Sarpi's reference to protection might suggest that he was familiar with Bodin's work.

85 Sarpi, *Massime*, in *Pensieri*, p. 705: "*La colleganza de disuguali si cambia in protezzione e finalmente in soggezzione*". See also Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 521: "*mutando la protezzione in superiorità*".

did not deem this an adequate solution, because "all the reasons (when not in use) deteriorate and disappear" until, in the end, they will be "annihilated".[86] The other problem with such a decision was that it not only undermined the validity of the Venetian sovereignty, it also had the potential to improve the position of the Roman curia. To do nothing, Sarpi concluded, would only allow the "disturbances" to become "violations". Venice would eventually lose the possession, since mere titles did not count for much in jurisdictional cases.[87] If the Venetians were to refrain from making the necessary acts of superiority, Sarpi argued, they would gradually lose sovereignty, and with it the foundation of every jurisdictional legitimacy.

The second option was that Venice could have begun a negotiation with Rome. Sarpi nevertheless rejected this too on the grounds that by taking such an initiative Venetians would have weakened their own position by implying that the sovereignty was actually in the hands of the pope. In general, negotiation was the best means to resolve any controversy, Sarpi admitted, but only if the initiative were to come from the opposing side. Sarpi believed that the best course of action was for Venice to "continue its possession by exercising acts of sovereignty".[88] This would have preserved the sovereignty in Venice and forced Rome to take the initiative for any possible negotiations. The only way to preserve ones "reasons", Sarpi argued, was to "maintain them by continuous acts of possession", even when the reasons themselves are "most valid".[89] Thus, for Sarpi, acts of sovereignty were simply different kinds of commandments that the sovereign gave through laws and decrees. It was nevertheless crucial that these commandments were obeyed, Sarpi remarked, since otherwise they maintained "neither the jurisdiction nor the possession". Since sovereignty was preserved only if subjects obeyed their ruler and since there always was a risk of resistance, it was vital to avoid "commanding" when not sufficiently resolute to secure obedience.[90] Sarpi observed that the ruler had to be ready to bear the

86 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 519: "*chiarezza e validità del titolo . . . Tutte le raggioni* (*non essendo usate*) *deteriorano, e perdono, e finalmente in progresso di tempo sono . . . anichilate*".

87 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 520: "*le turbazioni deventerano degezzioni, e la possessione si perderà, nel qual caso il titolo, se ben legitimo e chiaro, sarà di poco valore, perché . . . nelle cause giurisdizzionali s'attende la possessione principalmente*".

88 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 520: "*continuare la sua possessione essercitando li atti di sopranità*".

89 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 520: "*non vi è altra maniera di conservar le raggioni, ancor che validissime* (*massime quando si possede civilmente, e non corporalmente*) *se non mantenendole continuamente con atti possessorii*".

90 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 521: "*Chiara cosa è che per comandamenti non obediti e per decreti non essequiti non si acquista né si mantiene giurisdizzione né possessione . . . per il che sopra tutte le cose converrà guardarsi da comandare o decretare senza efficacissima resoluzione di volerne veder l'obedienza e l'essecuzione*".

consequences of his commandments and, if necessary, to use force in order to make his subjects comply with his will; failing to rule according to this principle would have invalidated his sovereignty. All this bespeaks Sarpi's preference for a political strategy, which was active, pragmatic and in favour of continuous display of power. It was also a strategy that pointed towards the Machiavellian idea that rulers were expected to be ready to use power, even violence, in order to make their subjects obey. His political theory was no doubt conducive to power politics.

Indeed, in Sarpi's opinion the sovereignty of Venice over Ceneda had been established through conquest or "war and peace". In 1388, following six years of war against Carrara, Ceneda became a subject of Venice. Ceneda's bishop had abandoned the defence of his diocese and, Sarpi wrote, "the right reason of war entailed that all jurisdiction was passed to him who with his blood and at his expenses had regained it".[91] While those in favour of Rome's sovereignty over Ceneda argued that the bishop had received Ceneda as a donation from Otto I already in 962 and that the donation remained valid and included "every jurisdiction, even the supreme power", Sarpi replied that the donations of Otto I were extinct because of the succeeding wars, "and because the divine law is such, that the dominions and states change and transfer by the reason of war".[92] Sarpi concluded that the papacy could not possibly claim sovereignty over Ceneda, because Venice already had it and "sovereignty is indivisible and cannot be but in one". He then argued that according to divine and human laws there were only three possible ways to obtain sovereignty over a certain state: "the reason of war, self-surrender of a free people, and concession by the prince who has earlier had the sovereignty".[93] The pope had not made war in order to obtain Ceneda, nor had the people of Ceneda ever been free to surrender themselves to the pope, nor had the emperor ever given Ceneda to the pope as a donation or by means of any commercial transaction. The only reasonable claim was that the jurisdiction given to the bishop in 962 as an imperial

91 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 527: "*il titolo col quale vostra Serenità possede Ceneda è titolo di guerra e pace*"; pp. 529–530: "*la giusta raggione di guerra comportava che tutta la giurisdizzione passasse in chi col suo sangue e con le sue spese l'aveva racquistata*".

92 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 531: "*che quella donazione sia assoluta e libera sì che comprendi ogni giurisdizzione, eziandio la suprema potestà*"; p. 539: "*le quali* (*donazioni di Ottone*) *per li successi della guerra sono estinte . . . et essendo così la lege di Dio, che li dominii e stati si mutino e transferiscano per la raggione di guerra*".

93 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 540: "*essendo la sopranità indivisibile, e che non può star se non in un solo . . . la raggion di guerra, la dedizione d'un popolo libero e la concessione di un principe che prima avesse la sopranità*".

donation had passed to the pope. However, Sarpi specified that the jurisdiction donated to the bishop in 962 was of "inferior", "not the supreme" quality.[94]

The ruling elite of early seventeenth-century Venice had clearly become alienated from republican values and traditions. Not only Sarpi's absolutistic rhetoric about the nature of sovereignty, but also his claim that subjects, or private citizens, did not possess absolute dominion over their personal property reveals a great gap between him and a more orthodox form of republican thought as expressed, for instance, by the Florentine writer Donato Giannotti (1492–1573). According to Giannotti it was natural for men to defend their own property, and to do so by joining the militia, which made them equal citizens who pursued common good.[95] While in Giannotti's republican vision individual citizens defended their own property as members of the militia and thereby contributed to civic harmony and common values of a republic, Sarpi regarded individual people as mere subjects who had no real possessions to defend, but who nevertheless obeyed the sovereign out of natural affection. Not only did Sarpi depart from the republican tradition, but also from the Dominican tradition represented by Aquinas and the French theologian John of Paris (1255–1306). According to these theologians neither princes nor popes really owned the property over which they possessed jurisdiction. In John of Paris' view the state was actually established by individual owners in order to protect their property.[96] Besides Aquinas and John of Paris, the French conciliar theorist Jean Gerson argued that no ruler or pope could regard a commonwealth or the personal goods of its members as his own property.[97] Sarpi's point of view was extremely radical and clashed with that of many political thinkers. It has been suggested that his concept of sovereignty consisted of the state's total control of subjects, benefices, feudal fees, printing and borders.[98] The radical characteristics of Sarpi's interpretation of sovereignty can be explained by his eagerness to submit himself to the service of a higher power, a tendency, which erased all individual passions and rights for the sake of total obedience to the sovereign ruler. In addition to this, the unremitting rivalry between the representatives of church and state created a pressing need to clearly articulate the boundaries between the two authorities. As we have seen, this led to the adoption of markedly absolutistic rhetoric on both sides of the debate.

In Venice the first steps towards centralizing all political authority were taken towards the end of the sixteenth century, in particular by strengthening

94 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 540: "*solo la inferior giuridizzione, non la suprema*".

95 Pocock 2003, pp. 291–293.

96 Coleman 2000, p. 79.

97 Skinner 1978, p. 117.

98 Barzazi 1985, p. 226.

the control over local aristocracies in the terraferma.[99] Sarpi did his best to encourage this development and the advisers who immediately succeeded him continued on the same path, spurring the government to affirm its sovereignty over the subjects and the clergy whenever the latter tried to expand their authority from strictly spiritual to temporal matters. Venetian absolutism was nevertheless to remain but a short period in *La Serenissima*'s history and the centralizing policy of its leaders withered away in few decades. Already in 1647 the senate of the economically decrepit republic was forced to start selling jurisdictional authority over certain localities.[100] Nonetheless, during the first decades of the seventeenth century the nobility of Venice closely observed and, at least to a certain extent, mimicked the rhetoric of those political writers who lived in the emerging absolutistic kingdoms of France and England.

Obedience, Resistance and Regicide

Insistence on obedience and rejection of all forms of resistance were some of the key characteristics of absolutism. These principles became central topics of political discourse all around late sixteenth-century Europe. Soon after the deposition of Mary Stuart in 1567, for example, a vivid discussion on the legitimacy of resistance took place in Scotland. The most important champion of Scottish resistance theory was George Buchanan (1506–1582), a Calvinist and humanist who had received scholastic training under the guidance of his fellow countryman John Mair (1467–1550). While the Thomist tradition insisted on the natural sociability of man, Buchanan adhered to Cicero's Stoic version of the original state of mankind, according to which men lived like animals, namely, without order, religion or social duties. This was also the interpretation preferred by the Ockhamist tradition and in particular by Jacques Almain and John Mair. In their view the savage conditions of early mankind demonstrated that the foundations of political societies were not laid by God, but by men themselves with a contract, through which people expressed their consent to become subjects of a ruler. According to the Thomist interpretation this contract alienated people's original sovereignty to the ruler, but Buchanan, Almain and Mair argued that this transfer of authority was merely a delegation, not alienation. The latter argued that a ruler was never a sovereign *legibus solutus* and superior to his dominion, *maior universis*, but, instead, a *minister* who was bound by the positive law. Since it was the people who gave the ruler his power,

99 Povolo 1997, *passim*.

100 Barzazi 1985, p. 250.

Buchanan argued, they also had the right to depose him and, within reason, to kill him as a body of people or even as an individual citizen. To lend approval to a regicide or tyrannicide enacted by a single individual was an extremely radical point of view in the context of sixteenth-century Europe.[101]

Where does Sarpi stand with regard to the subjects' right to resist or even kill their ruler? There is a *pensiero* from the early 1590's, in which Sarpi touched upon the possibility of regicide:

> In republics and tyrannies not only the subjects, but also the ruler, serves. Since he has to take into consideration an infinite number of things in order to avoid offending the subjects, it means that he is afraid, and operates out of fear. He could indeed kill the subjects, but equally, the subjects, all or a notable part of them, could safely kill him. Thus, one can absolutely say that every man serves, and no animal serves more than the man, who believes he commands everyone.[102]

In this *pensiero* Sarpi did not take any stance for or against regicide, because to say that a ruler can be killed does not mean that he should or should not be killed. What is more interesting here is that in Sarpi's view the ruler served his subjects. While this is a claim not easily reconciled with Sarpi's absolutism, it is nevertheless in keeping with Jean Gerson's view of the ruler as a minister of the community and with Ockham's argument that in "exceptional circumstances" a king "may be inferior to the kingdom".[103] As we know, Sarpi was familiar with the work of both writers, but I find it unlikely that the *pensiero* would have echoed their views on the matter. Rather than criticism of absolutism or an expression of conciliar predilection, the *pensiero* should be read as further evidence for Sarpi's readiness to serve. He advocated no particular politics in the quotation, which nevertheless provides an insight to his understanding of the role and destiny of each man. For Sarpi, the human condition was one of servitude, whether one lived in a republic or in a tyranny, whether one was the humblest of subjects or the ruler of many. This does not, however,

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101 Skinner 1978, vol. II, pp. 339–343, 347; Burns 1993, pp. 3–5, 7.

102 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 470, p. 353: "*Nelle republiche e tirannie non solo servon i sudditi, ma il principe ancora serve: imperciò che ha egli d'aver infiniti rispetti di non offendere i sudditi, onde gli teme, e il servir è operare per timore, potendo ben egli ammazzare i sudditi, ma ugualmente i sudditi, o tutti o in parte notabile, ammazzar lui con sicurezza. Può dunque dirsi assolutamente che ogni uomo serve, e che niun animale serve più dell'uomo, il quale a tutti si crede comandare*".

103 Skinner 1978, vol. II, pp. 117, 126.

compromise the strict hierarchy that Sarpi envisaged between the ruler and the ruled. Nor does it mean that in Sarpi's view the latter could have disobeyed or resisted the former.

Not surprisingly, the assassin of Henry IV of France in May 1610 provoked many a writer to comment on the idea of regicide. Sarpi did this in his correspondence with Jacques Leschassier. Sarpi referred to regicide as "wicked", the "pestilence of public affairs", and something that should be fought back "not lightly". He then asserted that the Spanish Jesuit Juan de Mariana (1536–1624) was by no means the only one to support the doctrine of regicide, since "no one of the Jesuits refrains from it". In fact, "if you would read Suárez", Sarpi informed Leschassier, "you would consider Mariana a joke".[104] In another letter Sarpi quoted from Suárez' *Disputationes* that "subjects are permitted to arm themselves against their ruler" not only "if the pope orders or accepts this", but also "if they think that the pope will be grateful and in favour". In other words, Suárez approved of regicide even in the case that the pope would not express an explicit order or approval of the act.[105] Sarpi never mentioned Buchanan in his writings, but since Leschassier referred to Buchanan (together with Juan de Mariana) in one of his letters to Sarpi, we must conclude that the latter knew who Buchanan was and what he stood for. Given the antipathy that Sarpi felt against the Jesuits, it is hardly surprising that he chose to attack Mariana and Suárez instead of the Calvinist Buchanan. The resentment that he felt over the theory of regicide is nevertheless palpable: "I cannot help getting angry, when I think of this new doctrine, which, against all divine and human laws, asserts that a prince can be killed with the pretext of religion". In his opinion the doctrine should have been removed "with the consensus of all mankind".[106]

While not explicitly attacking Buchanan, Sarpi did this indirectly by praising William Barclay, another Scot who also happened to be one of Buchanan's main adversaries and the man who coined the term 'monarchomach' to signify,

104 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 22 June 1610, pp. 85–86: "*pestem rerum publicarum . . . Non unus Mariana ausus est eius praeco fieri; nullus Iesuitarum abstinet. Suarez videas, Marianam iocum dixeris*".

105 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 3 August 1610, p. 88: "*est in disput. 15 quaest. 6. Ibi habet, subditis licere contra principem suum armari, nedum si papa iusserit, aut concesserit, sed etiam . . . si putaverint papae gratum et probatum fore, licet non ausus fuerit mentem suam aperire*".

106 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 8 June 1610, p. 83: "*Divina iudicia admiror quidem, et veneror, nec tamen possum non stomachari, dum hanc novam doctrinam considero, quae contra omnia divina et humana iura principes occidi posse asserat, religionis obtentu, quae nisi consensu totius orbis exterminetur, actum video de commercio generis humani*".

in an absolutely negative sense, a king-killer.[107] Jacques Gillot sent Sarpi a copy of Barclay's *De potestate papae* in 1609, immediately after the publication of the book. Sarpi's first impression of Barclay's work was positive and he admired the writer's judgment, which showed that he was an "exact disputant". *De potestate papae* proved "very usable", especially in Italy, Sarpi remarked to Francesco Castrino, and from Gillot he asked more information about Barclay and, in particular, about the latter's book *De regno et regali potestate, adversus Buchananum, Brutum, Boucherium et reliquos monarchomachos* from 1600. In the end, Sarpi concluded that "everything that this author gathers and analyzes so judiciously in this work, I totally accept".[108] That Sarpi so unequivocally approved of Barclay's ideas demonstrates both his opposition to the idea of regicide and his sympathy for absolutism, since Barclay was a renowned champion of monarchism (John Locke referred to him as "that great assertor of the power and sacredness of the Kings".)[109]

While Sarpi clearly sympathized with Ockham and Gerson, his political theory did not acknowledge any sort of a human mediator who would have transferred the power from God to the ruler. In contrast to Ockham and Gerson (and even more so with regard to Almain, Mair and Buchanan) Sarpi took it for granted that under any circumstances the people or the community had no supremacy over the ruler and, as a consequence of this, they were never allowed to resist, not to mention depose or kill their ruler. He nevertheless complained that the doctrine of regicide was defended everywhere in Italy, because of the influence of the Jesuits. In Venice, however, "where the prince has more than one body, we do not fear". Sarpi made the same point in another letter, remarking that "they cannot kill or cut the throat of the republic", because it "does not depend on one sole man".[110] Coming from Sarpi, this was a rare expression of pride over Venice's republican form of government.

While Bodin admitted that an illegitimate tyrant could be "slaine", he nevertheless argued that a legitimate sovereign could not be resisted in any way, unless he became "cruell, covetous and wicked", in which case he "may lawfully

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107 Burns 1993, p. 5; Skinner 1978, vol. II, p. 301.

108 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 15 September 1609, p. 134: "*exactus disputator videatur*"; Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, to Castrino, 15 September 1609, p. 51: "*mi pare di molto uso, massime qui*"; Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Gillot, 29 September 1609, p. 136: "*Cuncta quae hic auctor magno iudicio collegit et digessit in hoc opusculo, mihi maxime probantur*".

109 Locke, Two Treatises on Government, II., 232, p. 419.

110 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, to Leschassier, 28 September 1610, p. 94: "*Hic, ubi princeps non unico corpore vivit, non timemus*"; *ibid*., to Leschassier, 14 September 1610, p. 91: "*Non possunt rempublicam obtruncare aut iugulare, quae uni homini non innititur*".

be slaine" by a foreign ruler, but not by his own subjects: "it is not lawfull for any one of the subiects in particular, or all of them in generall, to attempt any thing either by way of fact, or of iustice against the honour, life, or dignitie of the soveraigne". A subject could never "proceed against his prince", neither *de iure*, nor *de facto*.[111] Bodin argued that if the subjects were allowed to kill a legitimate ruler, whether a tyrant or not, this might lead to the situation in which "many good and innocent princes should as tirants perish". He then remarked that the only remedy against this sort of a tyrant was "to flie and hide ourselves from him".[112] While Bodin recommended fleeing and hiding, Sarpi asserted that he would obey any sort of a rule, even if it was the case that a wicked ruler would give him a harmful commandment: "I cannot assent, but I will obey", he affirmed.[113] In a similar vein, Micanzio declared in one of his sermons that "one has to obey the princes, even though they were wicked and infidel".[114]

That the two Servite friars advocated obedience even to wicked rulers was illustrative of their adoption of the divine right theory and their belief in any legitimate ruler's position as a representative of God. It follows from this that all obedience performed to legitimate rulers was, ultimately, obedience to God. Sarpi made this point with a reference to St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "for there is no authority except from God" and who resists civil authority, which is "not human, but divine", he perforce "resists the divine will".[115] In Sarpi's view obedience was natural, while disobedience was an act of violation and as such pointed towards the ungodly and the unnatural. In a *consulto* written only few weeks prior to his death Sarpi referred to the "respect and reverence" which "nature instills and God in holy Scriptures commands", and "which every person has to show to the prince who is His vicar and lieutenant".[116] Elsewhere he referred to this sort of reverence as the "natural affection" which subjects feel for their ruler. Sarpi's idea of obedience as the outcome of natural

111 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. II, chap. V, pp. 218, 220, 222.

112 Bodin, *Commonweale*, bk. II, chap. V, p. 225.

113 Sarpi, *Massime*, in *Pensieri*, p. 692: "*Al comandamento pregiudiciale . . . Non posso assentire ma ubidirò*".

114 I quote from Rein 1904, p. 224.

115 Sarpi, *Della potestà de' prencipi*, p. 34: "*non enim est potestas, nisi a Deo . . . Non è cosa umana, ma divina il publico governo; chi se gli rende contumace resiste alla volontà divina*".

116 I quote from Pin 2006b, p. 392 note 98: "*Ma la cura del ben commune Dio l'ha commessa al Prencipe solo . . . per il che a lui solo sta prescrivere li modi di conservare e mantenere questo bene, se con impositioni, se con guerra, se con leghe od altri mezi, et in questo chi che sia, o confessore od altro, che se ne voglia fare giudice o censore, offende la Maestà et opera contro quel rispetto e riverenza che la natura instilla e Dio nelle Sante Scritture commanda che ogni persona debba portar al Prencipe, che è suo vicario e luogotenente*".

affection resembles Paolo Paruta's argument that love of one's homeland was never based on a custom or positive law, but, instead, it was "engraved by nature in our souls" and was "most natural and most ancient". Calvin too expressed the necessity of obedience in a language of sentiment when he exhorted his readers to "honour" rulers with a "sincere and heartfelt esteem".[117] Sarpi and Calvin were speaking of love of God, which found its expression in the subjects' obedience to the sovereign, the minister of God. In general, Sarpi objected to disobedience, because it entailed violation against God's explicit commandment to obey: "man is subject to the laws and orders of his spiritual and temporal superiors", Sarpi argued, "because God has commanded that he showed obedience to them".[118] Furthermore, for Sarpi obedience was beneficial and led to progress. Indeed, Sarpi wrote about the lack of discipline in Italian armies and complained how "even a most insignificant and inexperienced" soldier never wanted to "obey the great and the experienced". This, he concluded, was one of the obstacles that stood in the way of "good progress".[119]

There was an important exception, however, to Sarpi's otherwise consistent rejection of the right to resist and disobey authorities. While never approving of any sort of disobedience to secular authorities, Sarpi frequently questioned the requirement to obey the papacy. As we have seen, he rejected the idea of papal infallibility and declared the pope's ban on Venice null, from which it was only a short step to full-fledged disobedience. In his *consulto* on the force and validity of the inderdict Sarpi vindicated the Venetians' nonobservance of the papal ban and claimed that their disobedience was legitimate, because both God and natural law authorized the victim of an unjust attack to "fight power with power".[120] More to the point, Sarpi argued that the pope's authority was "not inviolable" and there were instances when "one can resist" the pope

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117 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 17 December 1618, f. 13, c. 240r: "*Prencipi, verso quali hanno la naturale affettione*"; Paruta, *Della perfezione della vita politica*, p. 216: "*l'amor della Patria . . . non è . . . partorito dall consuetudine, nè formato d'alcuna legge degli uomini; ma ben nato insieme con noi . . . quasi per mano della stessa natura, scolpito nella nostra anima*"; p. 218: "*quest'affetto di amare la Patria, naturalissimo e antichissimo*"; Calvin, *On civil government*, p. 74.

118 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 10: "*l'uomo sia soggetto alle leggi e precetti de' suoi superiori spirituali e temporali, perché Dio ha commandato che si presti obedienza loro*".

119 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. I, 11 April 1617 to Groslot de l'Isle, p. 282: "*. . . delle dispute de' nostri capitani italiani, tra' quali non si può trovar uno ben basso ed inesperto che voglia obbedire ad un grande e perito: e questa è una delle cause che impedisce il far alcun progresso buono*".

120 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 465: "*Questo rimedio è* de iure naturali, *che chi ingiustamente è assalito possi* vim vi repellere. *Concede Dio e la natura che quando l'avversario contro raggione usa la forza, la raggione nostra sii sostentata colla forza*".

"without harming one's conscience or committing a sin".[121] In his history of the interdict Sarpi mentioned the recent publication of an Italian edition of a treatise by Jean Gerson and referred to the editor's letter, in which it was asserted that the Venetian clergy should continue attending their churches "without any fear of offending God by disobeying the interdict".[122] The editor of the treatise was Sarpi himself, as Micanzio revealed in his biography, and the argument that the clergy could disobey the papal interdict without violating against God was significant in that it made a clear distinction between the word of God and that of the pope or the clergy. This also reflects the fact that in Sarpi's view the true representatives of God on earth were the secular rulers, not the pope, because disobeying the former amounted to violating against God, while defiance of papal authority could be a commendable act: a Christian should never obey a commandment, even if it was given by the pope, without first examining whether the commandment was "convenient and legitimate and obligatory". Sarpi went so far as to insist that the one "who obeys blindly" and "without any examination", "commits a sin".[123] It should be stressed that here Sarpi's objective was to justify Venice's refusal to acknowledge and obey the interdict, because such acknowledgment would have compromised Venice's independence. It was Sarpi's paramount duty to protect the independence of Venice, a duty, which he clearly identified with the obligation to defend God's will. Therefore, if anyone—the pope included—challenged Venice's status as an independent city-state by interfering in its legislation, it was not only legitimate, but also necessary to disobey and repel such initiatives.

The kind of theology that was practiced in Rome was, in Sarpi's view, politically motivated, since it aimed to deceive "the simple-minded" to believe that he was "obliged to obey the pope in all matters".[124] With this in mind, the interdict crisis tested the allegiance of the Venetian populace as it forced them to choose between the pope and the government of Venice. In his history of the interdict Sarpi proudly stated that "in every place there was seen an incredible

121 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 469: "*la potestà pontificia non è così inviolabile, non è senza alcuna opposizione . . . ma ci è qualche caso nel quale se gli può far resistenza, salva la conscienza e senza peccato*".

122 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 287: "*A questo s'aggionse una lettera senza nome dell'auttore, che esortava li curati ad attendere alle loro chiese, senza timore di offender Dio non servando l'interdetto*". For Sarpi being the editor, see Micanzio, *Vita*, pp. 1334–1335.

123 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 21: "*Il cristiano non debbe prestar obedienza al commandamento che gli viene fatto* (*se ben fosse dal sommo pontefice*), *se prima non averà esaminato il commandamento . . . se è conveniente e legittimo e obligatorio; e quello che senza alcun esamine del precetto fattogli ubidisce alla cieca, pecca*".

124 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 64: "*sono ingannati li semplici, e indotti a credere che in tutte le cose vi sia obligo di obedire al papa!*".

effect of obedience to and observance" of the will of the "prince".[125] Although the "cities and people remained most quiet in obedience", this did not happen simply out of "volontary respect and obedience of the people", but "providence of the senate and diligence of the magistrates who invigilated all the accidents" was required as well.[126] While emphasizing the subjects' loyalty to Venice instead of Rome served Sarpi's propagandistic purposes, his remark that loyalty was achieved with the help of the senate and the magistrates illustrates his profoundly hierarchical understanding of society. In such a system individuals were helpless and constantly in the need of divine grace, which at the moment of the interdict crisis was delivered to them through the providential, divinely inspired acts of the government of Venice.

Sarpi distinguished sharply between the word of God and that of the clergy when he argued that it was necessary to show "absolute obedience to God", but "to prelates a limited one", one that was to remain "within the boundaries of Divine law".[127] While repeatedly defying the authority of the popes and the clergy, Sarpi associated disobedience to secular rulers with sin. He disapproved of the "infinity of books", which claimed that "disobedience to a prince is not a sin" and considered it difficult, if not impossible, to "govern well" such people who were "impressed by these opinions".[128] An oath of allegiance to the sovereign could have remedied the situation, Sarpi wrote to Leschassier. Here he expressed discontent over the fact that ecclesiastical beneficiaries did "not take any oath or make any promise to the prince" and as a result the republic was perpetually at odds with the Roman curia. After having pointed out that he was familiar with the English and French oaths to the king, Sarpi asserted that in Venice too "it would be an excellent measure to add some kind of an oath should the opportunity arise".[129] It proved difficult, however, to establish such

125 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 215: "*si vidde in ogni luoco effetto incredibile d'obedienza et osservanza verso il suo prencipe*".

126 Sarpi, *Interdetto*, p. 228: "*le città e popoli si conservarono quietissimi nell'obedienza . . . Una tanta tranquillità non solo nacque dal volontario ossequio et obedienza delli popoli, ma ancora dalla providenza del senato e diligenza delli magistrati, che invigilarono a tutti li accidenti*".

127 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 252: "*A Dio si rende assoluta obbedienza; alli Prelati una limitata tra li termini della Legge Divina*".

128 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 1223: "*con molto despiacere un'infinità de libri, quali affermano . . . che la disubidienza al principe non sia peccato . . . come sia possibile ben governar persone impresse di queste opinioni*".

129 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, p. 18: "*Beneficiarius vero nihil principi iurat aut promittit . . . Aliquod iuramentum addere optimum consilium foret opportunitate observata*".

an oath in Venice. Eleven years after his letter to Leschassier, Sarpi concluded in a *consulto* that it was practically impossible to demand an oath of allegiance from members of the clergy, because they already had sworn allegiance to their religious superiors and a "second oath cannot prejudice a former one".[130]

The rivalry between temporal and spiritual authorities over the loyalty of individual citizens became particularly tense during Sarpi's lifetime. Deeply involved in this contest, Sarpi was sensitive to what he considered the clergy's habitual use of religion for political purposes. One example of this was the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, which Sarpi deemed "the finest secret which has ever been discovered for applying religion to the purpose of making men idiotic".[131] In his view it was a common practice amongst the clergy to conceal information in order to manipulate and rule Christian subjects. Although Sarpi regarded the *Index* as yet another trick played by the advocates of Rome, he was at the same time in favour of vigilant censorship as practiced by secular rulers. Fully aware of the weight of a written word, he argued that the "substance of books" often "appears to be something unimportant, because it is all words". However, "these words bring about opinions", which in turn lead to "partiality, seditions, and finally, wars".[132] It was advisable to "close the front door" to the kind of writing which attacked or defamed secular authority, Sarpi argued, or, if this was not feasible, at least to launch a counter-attack against the calumniators.[133] His keen advocacy of censorship against anti-governmental writings implies that he regarded sovereignty as something untouchable and sacred; he was equally abhorred by writings that attacked a legitimate ruler as he was by the notion of regicide.

Sarpi's advocacy of obedience had its roots deep in the Christian concept of spiritual perfection through self-negation, but it also mirrored the ideas of contemporary thinkers such as Jean Bodin, William Barclay, Michel de

130 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 12 Agosto 1619, f. 13, c. 323v: "*il giuramento di fedeltà, il quale li Chierici non possono prestare per un'altro giuramento di fedeltà precedente, che hanno prestato alli loro superiori . . . perche il secondo giuramento non può pregiudicar al primo*".

131 I quote from Thompson 1954, p. 540 (original source: Sarpi, *Ist.Conc.Trid.* 2nd.ed. Geneva 1629, II, p. 91).

132 Sarpi, *SG*, p. 190: "*La materia de' libri par cosa di poco momento perché tutta di parole; ma da quelle parole vengono le opinioni nel mondo, che causano le parzialità, le sedizioni e finalmente le guerre*". See also Sarpi, *SS*, p. 465: "*Non nelle sole armi sta la forza, ma nelle parole ancora*" ('the power is not only in arms, but also in words').

133 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 524: "*chiuder l'adito a queste scritture, sarebbe il proprio e vero rimedio; questo non si potendo fare . . . levargli la forza con opporli altre scritture che scuoprino la malignità e falsità insieme*".

Montaigne, Justus Lipsius and Pierre Charron. Each of these writers, with the possible exception of Bodin, belonged to the same circle of European intellectuals with a strong penchant for Neostoicism, a fact manifested by their mutual respect and admiration. For example, Montaigne described Lipsius as the most learned man of the era and Lipsius in turn depicted Montaigne as the 'French Thales', claiming that there was no one in Europe whose way of thinking had so close a resemblance to his own.[134] Also William Barclay admired Lipsius and found the latter's Neostoic book *De constantia* particularly persuasive. Although a scholastic theologian by education, Sarpi did not hesitate to draw on the same humanistic context as Lipsius, for example. It was typical of the learned, especially if they had the means to surpass the limits of provinciality, to base their worldview on a combination of Christian principles and pagan philosophies. When travelling was out of the question participation to this eclectic culture was achieved through the republic of letters. For instance, both Sarpi and Lipsius corresponded with Isaac Casaubon and the French erudite Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), putatively the most active letter-writer of the period. As we have seen, the latter may have visited *ridotto* Morosini, the regular gathering place of Sarpi and other learned Venetians. It is also worth mentioning that in 1612 John Barclay—William's son and a close friend of Fabri de Peiresc—briefly corresponded with Sarpi.[135] Thinkers like these were well versed in classical sources and reacted to religious wars and controversies with recourse to Stoicism, the ancient philosophy, which most emphasized constancy and mental firmness. Their Stoicism was, however, always confounded with Christianity and scepticism. Such a blend proved extremely successful and became adopted by the learned throughout Europe as their common language and philosophy.[136]

Lipsius was the leading proponent of Neostoicism. His major work, *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae* (1589), was a handbook of political wisdom replete with quotations from classical authors.[137] Besides this, it also was a systematic and coherent work on political theory. Montaigne, to whom Lipsius

134 Skinner 1978, vol. II, p. 278; Tuck 1993, p. 45.

135 Miller 2000, p. 42; Ulianich 1961, p. 280 note 148.

136 Miller 2000, p. 13: "from 1580 to 1640, this Christianized, aristocratic, eclectic, stoical, and sceptical philosophy of living was the fashionable intellectual language for educated Europeans from Seville to Danzig and from Jutland to Lower Austria"; Tuck 1993, p. 5; Burke 1991, p. 493.

137 The book was an international best-seller with fifteen editions in Latin and many more in translations into other languages already during the first ten years after its publication in 1589 (Oestreich 1982, p. 58).

sent a copy of the book, acknowledged it to be "erudite and laborious" and used it for his own writings.[138] In fact, it has been suggested that it was precisely the form, the discourse between various quotations and Lipsius' own remarks, rather than the ideas expressed that constituted the greatest political significance of the book: such quotations and commonplaces provided a means through which to reach the foundational level of European culture, to strike a chord with a common mentality beyond a surface of particularities and discord. According to this interpretation the fragmentariness of the *Politicorum* was only a veneer, which in fact aimed to serve the unity and the political equilibrium of a *Principatum*.[139]

In the beginning of the *Politicorum* Lipsius defined civil life as that what "we occupy together in a society of men to mutual commodity or use" and remarked that in order to succeed in living civilly we need to follow the two leading guides, prudence (*prudentia*) and virtue (*virtus*).[140] He then went on to emphasize the significance of virtue, which contained everything that was good and without which even prudence would turn into "craftiness and malice". Here he drew on earlier humanist writers and in particular on Francesco Patrizi (1529–1597) according to whom prudence, when dissociated from justice, turned into craftiness (*calliditas*) or malice (*malitia*).[141] The fact that Lipsius gave such emphasis to virtue was perfectly compatible with Stoicism and Christianity, especially because he divided virtue into two parts, piety (*pietas*) and probity (*probitas*). One of the two subcategories of piety was faith

138 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. I, chap. 26, p. 220: "*comme Lipse en ce docte et laborieux tissu de ses* Politiques". See also the note 11 in *ibid*., p. 474.

139 Moss 1996, pp. 472, 475–476. See also pp. 476–477, for an interesting discussion on how the form of the book was changed in the French (1590 and 1594), Spanish (1604) and Italian (1618) translations, and how these changes had consequences on the political ideology expressed in the book. The English translator (William Jones, 1594), however, remained faithful to the form. The 1618 Italian translation was preceded by one earlier edition in Italian, published in Rome in 1604 as noted in Fournel 1996, p. 485.

140 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 21: "*Vitam Civilem definio, quam in hominum societate mixti degimus, ad mutua commoda sive usum*". Although the book's title bears the originally Greek word "*politicorum*", Lipsius has here decided not to define "politics", but instead the Latin concept "vitam civilem". See Tuck 1993, pp. 10–11, 13, for diverging Renaissance translations of Aristotle's works: whereas Moerbeke maintained (and introduced into Latin) the Greek "politikos", Leonardo Bruni translated Aristotle's *Politics* as *De republica*.

141 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, pp. 21–22: "*Sine Virtute, Calliditas ea fit & malitia*". For Patrizi, see Viroli 1990, p. 165; Viroli 1992, pp. 114–115. Interestingly, Joseph Justus Scaliger criticized Lipsius of having plagiarized Patrizi elsewhere: "*Lipsius libro de Militia Romana omnia cepit ex Francisco Patritio*" (Morford 1991, p. 112 note 56).

(*sensus*), which in turn engendered fate (*fatum*), which according to Lipsius was nothing but a "sanction" and a sort of "voice of the divine intellect", and as such identical to that what Sarpi understood by *recta ratio* and Thomist thinkers by *ius naturale*, namely, the guiding information of God's designs and intentions implanted in men by God himself.[142] Piety, finally, consisted of listening, understanding and obeying the divine voice or *recta ratio*. In order to become "truly pious", Lipsius insisted, one had to "follow fate".[143] In a similar vein, Sarpi argued that "divine natural law", which contained "natural and immutable goodness" and commanded "things absolutely necessary to health" could not be disobeyed.[144]

It has been argued that the late sixteenth-century witnessed a "cult of obedience", which owed more to the influence of Lipsius and Neostoicism than it did to the Christian tradition which run from St. Paul to Luther.[145] However, while many writers no doubt used Neostoicism to promote civil obedience, in his writings Sarpi made far more references to St. Paul than to Seneca. I believe his idea of obedience was in the first place based on Christian and only secondarily on Stoic principles. It was in fact easy for any Christian writer to embrace Neostoicism, since the latter shared Christian ideas such as the belief in the ultimate benevolence of divine providence.[146] The fusion of Christian belief and Nestoicism is also manifest in Lipsius' work, as we can judge from his Seneca quotation according to which "it is best to tolerate that which you cannot rectify" and to follow God "without muttering", because everything happens under His leadership.[147] While Sarpi's eagerness to advance civil obedience may have gained additional strength from Neostoic philosophy, its origins were Christian and identical to Thomas Aquinas' concept of obedience as a form of self-denial, which was performed for the love of God. Indeed, besides St. Paul's letter to the Romans, Aquinas was clearly Sarpi's main source of inspiration in this matter. According to Aquinas there were "three kinds of human goods which a man can despise for God's sake": external goods, those of the

142 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 26: "*Nec id aliud . . . quàm sanctio et velut vox divinae mentis*". For the Thomist idea of *ius naturale*, see Skinner 1978, vol. II, p. 148.

143 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 28: "*ut verè pius fis, & fata sequare*".

144 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 10: "*obbligazione della legge divina naturale, dalla quale nissun timore scusa . . . essa contiene bontà naturale ed immutabile, e commanda cose assolutamente necessarie alla salute*".

145 Oestreich 1982, p. 131.

146 Bouwsma 1975, p. 9.

147 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 28: "*Optimum est pati quod emendare non possis: et deum, quo auctore cuncta eveniunt, sine murmure comitari*".

body, and "the goods of the soul" amongst which the highest good was the will. It is by the "virtue of obedience", Aquinas claimed, that we "despise our own will for God's sake", and this is "more praiseworthy than the other moral virtues", which make us "despise other goods for God's sake".[148] Sarpi approved of Aquinas' definition of sin as "deprivation of good" and argued that the "good that deprives disobedience" is the "virtue of obedience".[149] Obedience clearly played an important role in Aquinas' thought and it has been suggested that he based his entire soteriology on the idea of Christ's absolute obedience to God. In this scheme Christ's obedience was voluntary, because he obeyed out of charity, "out of love, to the Father's command", and such obedience was never based on necessity.[150] As we have seen, Sarpi considered the "law of charity" superior to any other law and at the same time insisted on the indispensability of obedience not only to divine law, but also to secular rulers, the executors of God's will. This shows that his concept of obedience was essentially a Christian idea. Besides Aquinas, he based his view on St. Paul and St. Augustine who emphasized, respectively, the importance of obeying civil authorities and the weakness of human nature.

At the same time, Neostoic philosophy made it easier to bear and submit oneself to the rule of another. In this respect, it was a useful tool against rebellion, resistance and regicide, all of which were considered threats to civil peace and harmony by writers such as Sarpi and Lipsius. "Disobedience", the latter asserted, "is the creator of all confusion".[151] Sarpi in turn summarized his point of view in one of his last *consulti*:

> But the care of the common good, this God has entrusted only to the prince together with the majesty; wherefore it pertains to him (prince) exclusively to prescribe the ways in which to conserve and maintain this good, whether with impositions, with war, with laws or other means, and in this matter whoever it would be, a confessor or somebody else, who would like to become a judge or a censor, offends the majesty and acts against that respect and reverence—which nature instils and God in holy

148 Aquinas, *Political writings*, p. 64.

149 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 103: "*San Tomaso … sempre dice il peccato esser privazione del bene … il bene che priva l'inobedienzia è un bene privato del suddito, che è la virtù sua dell'obedienzia*".

150 Armitage 2010, p. 525.

151 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 37: "*inobedientia confusionum parens*".

> Scriptures commands—which every person has to show to the prince, who is His vicar and lieutenant.[152]

Here Sarpi touched on such key elements of his political thought as absolutism, divine right theory and anticlericalism. He also referred to confessors as critics of secular authority, a theme frequently alluded to in his writings. There is a *consulto*, for example, in which Sarpi expressed particular anxiety over foreign friars who resided in Venetian monasteries but remained loyal to their country of origin. They were, he argued, "instruments of very pernicious contamination" and it was prudent to be aware of "how much damage the powerful tongue of an ill-disposed preacher can cause".[153] He considered preachers and confessors a threat to civic harmony, since they held sway over the moral sense of individual citizens and, what was more, were able to operate in secrecy. Defensive against what he considered machinations of the clergy, Sarpi insisted on the divine right of secular rulers and rejected any attempt to expand papal authority, which in his view challenged the peace and tranquility achieved through absolutistic rule. According to this line of thought it was crucial that coercive power belonged exclusively to secular rulers, otherwise the state would have turned into a two-headed monster. His fear of the influence of ill-disposed confessors mirrored his obsession with secrecy and readiness to implement harsh censorship measures in order to protect the interest of the state. In this respect, his political activity was informed by Machiavellism and reason of state theory.

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152 I quote from Pin 2006b, p. 392 note 98: "*Ma la cura del ben commune Dio l'ha commessa al Prencipe solo insieme con la Maestà: per il che a lui solo sta prescrivere li modi di conservare e mantenere questo bene, se con impositioni, se con guerra, se con leghe od altri mezi, et in questo chi che sia, o confessore od altro, che se ne voglia fare giudice o censore, offende la Maestà et opera contro quel rispetto e riverenza che la natura instilla e Dio nelle Sante Scritture commanda che ogni persona debba portar al Prencipe, che è suo vicario e luogotenente*".

153 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 17 December 1618, f. 13, c. 240r: "*sono istrumenti di molte pernitiose contaminationi ne i popoli*"; c. 240v: "*vien considerato quanto male possi causare la lingua potente d'un predicatore mal affetto*".

CHAPTER 8

The Interest of the State

Machiavellism

Although Sarpi repeatedly justified secular rulers' authority with divine right theory and explicit references to the Bible—thus advocating a form of statecraft which had its roots deep in Christianity—he nevertheless numbered amongst those early seventeenth-century thinkers whose political insight was strikingly secular and unmistakably affected by Machiavellism and reason of state theory. It should be stressed that this applied to the pragmatic aspects of his political thought (which include, for example, his partisan rhetoric and shameless use of the arguments put forth by his adversaries), while the theoretical foundations of his political thought remained compatible with Christianity. Paradoxically, Sarpi's view that political affairs were exclusively secular in character was in line with and issued from his religious ideas. His adoption of theories such as Machiavellism and reason of state can be explained by his Augustinian notion of the fallen, sinful and weak man; by his separation of the perfect heavenly sphere from the imperfect life on earth; and by his belief in the theory of atoms and the ubiquity of motion. At the mercy of sin, imperfection and ceaseless motion of all things Sarpi found solace in absolutism and divine right theory. In his view, these political theories were best executed through Machiavellian statecraft. It is remarkable that Sarpi resorted to this secular and progressive political language in order to advocate political ideas, which were fundamentally conservative and based on religious convictions about the nature of man and his destiny.

Taking its name from the Florentine political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)—the author of the notorious guidebook for rulers, *Il Principe*—Machiavellism stood for a cynical, even immoral view of politics. Sarpi was surely capable of overcoming moral scruples in decision-making processes, but it seems that the similarities between him and Machiavelli went deeper than mere political pragmatism. In his study of the Epicurean influences on Machiavelli's political thought Paul Rahe rejects the traditional interpretation of Machiavelli as a classical republican, claiming that the latter repudiated the idea of "natural human ends" and understood republican virtue in a strictly instrumental manner. According to this view, Machiavelli disdained moral virtue and was exclusively interested in the government's capacity to project power, which placed him in opposition to founders of classical republicanism

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such as Thucydides, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Sallust, Tacitus, Suetonius and Livy. Instead of basing his political philosophy on the high-minded classical idea of man as capable of moral and political rationality that transcends the pursuit of material interest, Rahe argues, Machiavelli turned to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, which offered him a "vision of nature as nothing more than matter in motion through an endless void". His republicanism was therefore consistent with Lucretius' vision of nature, which was ruled by motion and necessity. As Rahe points out, the connection between Machiavelli and Lucretius was perceived already by sixteenth-century writers such as the French theologian Innocent Gentillet.[1]

The resemblance between Sarpi and Machiavelli—as portrayed by Rahe—is striking in that both followed Epicurean theory of atoms and motion and, as far as political theory is concerned, advocated unscrupulous power politics on the basis of their negative idea of the nature of man. At the same time, however, it is clear that Sarpi's political thought was not exclusively Machiavellian, nor did he adopt Epicureanism because of his reading of the *Il Principe* or the *Discorsi*. Machiavellism was, for Sarpi, a political strategy and language, a rhetorical means to transcend moral scruples in his defence of the independence of Venice. He was quick to perceive Machiavellism in his enemies' manoeuvres and felt justified to recommend similar measures to his employers.

Machiavellism promoted a markedly secular view of politics. In early-modern political debates references to Machiavellism were often twinned with accusations of atheism. This association with irreligiosity resulted in the anti-Machiavellian movement, which was launched by books such as Giovanni Botero's *Ragion di stato* and Justus Lipsius' *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae* (both published in 1589), and which aspired to a specifically Christian method of ruling and preserving a state.[2] It is fascinating that Sarpi, while admiring Lipsius' work, chose to follow Machiavelli's secular approach to politics. It would be easy to conclude from this that Sarpi was a modern, secular and even atheistic thinker, but, as this book has sought to demonstrate, his intellectual outlook was fundamentally medieval and Christian. That he did not join Botero's and Lipsius' anti-machiavellian campaign does not question his religiosity, it only proves his distaste for the merging of religion and politics. Making a clear distinction between the two Sarpi favoured a thoroughly secular execution of politics and remained indifferent to any particularly Christian method of ruling. It should be stressed, however, that this did not compromise his Christian belief. He was concerned with the art of ruling and eager to preserve the best

1 Rahe 2007, pp. 32–33, 38–39, 48, 51–55.

2 Bireley 1990, p. 3; Kahn 1994, pp. 60–61.

interests of the state, but, at the same time, the foundations of his political thought rested on Augustinian concepts of man, salvation and grace.

Having imbibed Machiavelli's teachings about the inherently deceitful nature of politics, Sarpi was constantly on guard for the intrigues that potential enemies might contrive under the guise of religion. He was particularly concerned about the influence that priests and confessors had over people and believed that the nature of confession was such that the intimacy and secrecy with which it was performed hugely intensified the persuasive power of the confessor's speech. As a result, he insisted on the need to "keep surveillance over the books, ecclesiastics, and confessors who imprint in people ideas that are prejudicial to the government".[3] In fact, the fear that confession boxes were used for antigovernmental political propaganda and espionage was fairly common during the sixteenth century and, in the case of Venice, reached its peak during the interdict crisis.[4] Much to Sarpi's resentment, the local inquisitors daily fabricated "secret and occult reports" on people whom they considered suspicious. As loyal servants to the pope, they then sent these accounts to Rome for future use against the republic. Such scheming, Sarpi believed, posed a severe threat to the republic. He compared the threat to that posed by an incipient and still undetectable disease to the body; sooner or later the day would come when the malignant embryo would grow into an incurable illness. Sarpi concluded that "good governing" is therefore achieved through "prudence", which "teaches us not to neglect anything as a trifle" and "to obviate every peril" by making "such provisions which seem superfluous".[5] To combat papal corruption it was necessary for the senate to keep up a continuous preventive surveillance of anti-Venetian literature and gossip.

Early-modern Venice was a centre of information: it supported a thriving network of international scholars and merchants, and a hub for travellers eager to exchange news from different parts of the world.[6] It was equally a centre of espionage, counter-espionage and secrecy.[7] The Jesuits, Sarpi claimed, "spy on public affairs" and cause damage "to princes by penetrating the secret

3 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 1222: "*Li rimedi a questo male sono li communi ad ogn'altra machinazione che venga fatta da nemici sotto colore di religione. Questi consistono in star oculati sopra li libri, sopra li prelati, e sopra li confessori, che imprimono nel popolo concetti pregiudiciali al governo*".

4 Preto 2010, pp. 114–115.

5 Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 1222: "*secondo l'uso romano sarano dalli inquisitori giornalmente fabricati processi secreti et occulti delle persone proibite . . . In materia di buon governo la prudenza insegna non trascurar cosa alcuna per minima, et ovviare ad ogni pericolo in modo che più tosto siano fatte provisioni che parino superflue*".

6 Burke 2000, *passim*; De Vivo 2007, *passim*.

7 Preto 2010, *passim*, and, in particular, pp. 87–135.

negotiations of governments".[8] That clergymen were not allowed to be present in the senate during discussions on public affairs suggests that Sarpi was not the only Venetian to be concerned about espionage. Obsessed with secrecy, however, Sarpi found the ban on the clergy's presence insufficient: it was necessary, he believed, to conceal from the clergy even the timings of such occasions when the senate discussed public affairs. Otherwise the clergy's loyalty to the pope might compromise the "benefit of secrecy". Sarpi believed that the clergy felt compelled to reveal sensitive information, because they were told to do so either by their conscience or by the vows or oaths they had taken.[9] That Sarpi had no confidence in clergymen because he considered them too mindful of their own conscience implies that he himself—in line with Machiavelli's teachings—had no moral scruples as far as political affairs were concerned.

Sarpi's belief in the benefits of secrecy was not limited to the idea of concealing political matters from the clergy: "the right manner to govern a subject", Sarpi argued, "is to keep him from knowing public affairs".[10] Here too, we can see a reference to *arcana imperii*—state secrets—and the reason of state theory. A similar undertone permeates *Pensieri sulla religione*, in which he claimed that whenever there was a need, politicians used religion "by reason of sophism to preserve the state".[11] This quotation was in keeping with both reason of state theory and Machiavellism in that it described the use of religion for strictly political purposes. By the concept 'sophism' early-modern political writers indicated *arcana imperii*, state secrets. More precisely it referred to Aristotle's term 'sophismata', those rhetorical arrangements with which the ruling elite convinced the common people that they possessed political rights or power when they in fact had none. It has been argued that in sixteenth-century political discourse references to 'sophismata' indicated not

8 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, f. 20, c. 157v: "*et far la spia nelle cose publiche, et il danno, che portano alle prencipi penetrando li negotij secretti delli governi*". See also Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 147, p. 841, who referred to the Jesuits as "the most vigilent spies" (*li gesuiti, vigilantissime spie*). For Sarpi's view that espionage was common in Venice, see Preto 2010, p. 115.

9 Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, f. 13, c. 211: "*osservando se il Vicario è chiamato, o no si venirebbe a sapere se la causa, che si tratta è di stato, et si perderebbe il beneficio della secretezza . . . et se egli dirà di esser obligato a reverarla con qualche pretesto di conscientia, et de giuramenti, che fanno di revelare alcune cose alli suoi superiori . . . in modo che con indignità et mancamento della publica fede si paleseranno li secreti*".

10 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 534: "*il vero termine di regger il suddito è mantenerlo senza saputa delle cose publiche*".

11 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 649: "*E bisognando se ne vale in ragion di soffisma per conservazione dello stato*".

only political *arcana*, but also familiarity with Aristotelian and Machiavellian stratagems.[12] Sarpi's reference to 'sophism' is therefore further evidence for his Machiavellian approach to politics.

While Machiavelli was a forbidden author—his works were placed on the 1559 *Index librorum prohibitorum*—prohibited books had a fairly free circulation in Venice. According to the testimony of Fulgenzio Manfredi, one of Sarpi's colleagues, the majority of Venetian patricians possessed Machiavelli's writings "with or without a license".[13] Sarpi did not openly approve of Machiavelli's theories, but he was familiar with them: in a letter to Gillot in 1610 Sarpi remarked that Juan de Mariana's *De rege et regis institutione* was "no less impious" than Machiavelli's work.[14] At the same time, in his work as the senate's adviser Sarpi made use of many Machiavellian principles. On the day of his nomination the senators were read a piece of his writing which ended with a purely Machiavellian remark: "the only thing left is to appease the conscience and to execute without any scruples all that is necessary and opportune for maintaining Your sovereignty".[15] That Sarpi felt able to use such unscrupulous language in so public a setting indicates that Machiavelli's doctrines were discussed in fora such as *ridotto* Morosini and that Sarpi was confident of their positive reception amongst Venetian patricians.

The spreading of Machiavelli's ideas in Venice troubled the papacy and its supporters. Agesilao Mariscotti asserted that in Venice they "drink with milk more avidly the impious doctrine of Machiavelli than the doctrine of Christ".[16] In 1606 the Jesuit Antonio Possevino claimed that Machiavellian doctrines were available to anyone in Venice who was interested in them. Sarpi was in fact suspected of leading a secret academy in which Machiavelli's political doctrine was studied and admired.[17] While evidence for the existence of such an

12 Donaldson 1988, pp. 117–118.

13 Grendler 1978, pp. 110–111; Benzoni 1970, p. 43: according to Manfredi "*maggiore parte dei nobili*" had Machiavelli's writings "*con licenza o senza*".

14 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 2 March 1610, p. 145: "*nihilo machiavellico minus impium*".

15 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 472: "*Non resta se non serenare la conscienzia, et esequire quello che è necessario et opportuno per mantenere la sopranità sua senza nissun scrupolo*".

16 Mariscotti, *Aviso sicuro*, p. 12: "*in quella Città* (Venice) . . . *col latte stesso più avidamente si beve l'empia dottrina del Machiavello, che la dottrina del Cristo*".

17 Possevino, *Risposta*, p. 6; That Sarpi led such an academy was denied by a pseudonym Hoffman, *Avvertimento*, p. 5: "*E tra le altre cose ho inteso da persone vostre affettionatissime, che voi dite una graqndissima, & ingiuriosa falsità, mentre che affermate, che il P. Maestro Paolo sia stato capo di una Academia in questa Città, nella quale gli anni adietro si attendesse a dispute, e studi politici con la dottrina del Machiavelli*". See also, *Cozzi* 1969, p. 22; Wootton 1983, p. 42.

academy is lacking, we do know that Machiavelli was published in Venice as abridgements or under false titles and Venetian patricians were in the habit of writing down commonplaces from his writings.[18] While this practice also seems to have been commonly acknowledged in Rome, Venetians themselves kept quiet about it. It was prohibited even to mention Machiavelli's name, since he was "condemned by the most Holy Apostolic See into eternal oblivion".[19]

A theorist of secular sovereignty, Jean Bodin was another political writer to become prohibited by the Church of Rome. Not surprisingly, sixteenth-century commentators often associated him with Machiavelli.[20] Although placed on the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, writers such as Machiavelli and Bodin were widely read and provided Sarpi and other champions of secular authority with theoretical and pragmatic advice on how to justify political decisions. Sarpi found similar advice from Tacitism—political wisdom gleaned from the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus—which shared the general ethos of the reason of state theory (and which has been described as covert Machiavellism). The most influential advocate of Tacitism was Lipsius, whom Sarpi read approvingly, and who published his famous edition of Tacitus' *Opera* in 1574.[21] Sarpi possessed two different editions of Tacitus' works—*Annalium* (1576) and Lipsius' edition of *Opera* (1595)—and his writings contain several references to the Roman historian. In a letter to Leschassier Sarpi noted that it is best "not to reveal secrets", because, as "Tacitus reminds" us, this is the worst that can happen to an "empire".[22] He was no doubt aware of the resemblance between Tacitus' works and the notorious doctrines of Machiavelli and *ragion di stato*. While he caustically observed that the Jesuits were "good observers of all the precepts of Tacitus" he himself was not averse to taking guidance from the

18 De Vivo 2007, p. 135.

19 Paruta, *Discorsi politici*, p. 444: "*Nicolò Machiavelli . . . che hora condennato dalla Santissima Sede Apostolica ad oblivione perpetua, non è pur lecito di nominare*". Frajese 1994, p. 154, claims that Sarpi had read Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, and *ibid*., p. 409 note 62, that he knew well Marsilio's *Defensor Pacis*.

20 Viroli 1995, p. 68 note 6; Baldini 2001, p. 81. Antonio Possevino, for instance, wrote an entire book against Machiavelli, Bodin and other such writers: *Judicium de Nuae militis Galli Joannis Bodini, Philippi Mornaei, Nicolai Machiavelli* (1592). In general, for the resemblance between Machiavelli and Bodin, see Tenenti 1978, pp. 221–236.

21 Burke 1991, pp. 483–485; Wootton 1983, pp. 69–70. Wootton considers Lipsius, Scipione Ammirato and Traiano Boccalini as the most distinguished advocates of Tacitism.

22 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 23 December 1608, p. 34: "*et iudicum superstitioni frenum imponatur et arcana non evulgentur, quo nihil peius imperio cuicunque accidere posse Tacitus meminit*". For sarpi's possession of Tacitus' works, see Masetti Zannini 1970, p. 200.

same source.[23] It was important to learn about the "arts of the jesuits", Sarpi wrote to Leschassier, because the less one understood these arts, the more dangerous they became.[24] This remark mirrors Sarpi's mercurial character and shows that he was ready to respond to his political adversaries by using their own stratagems.

Ragion di stato

The concept of *ragion di stato*—reason of state—first appeared in the works of Francesco Guicciardini and Giovanni Della Casa (1503–1556).[25] The term really took off, however, with the publication of Giovanni Botero's book entitled *Ragion di stato* (1589). Over the course of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the concept appeared on numerous treatises on the art of statecraft. From the outset, reason of state was understood by political writers as a ruler's right to resort to extraordinary measures in order to preserve the state. Champions of *ragion di stato* emphasized the superiority of the matters of the state over issues such as the rights of individual citizens. While Della Casa opposed it to civil law in the sense that the doctrine elevated rulers above the law, Botero wrote that "state is a stable rule over people and reason of state is the knowledge of the means by which such a dominion may be founded, preserved, and extended".[26] This view of *ragion di stato* quickly branched into a discussion of two different types of statecraft; political theorists began to distinguish between 'good' or 'true' reason of state and a form of the doctrine that was wicked and false. True reason of state was said to serve the common good and was restricted by the principles of justice, piety and divine law. A corrupted version of the doctrine, it was believed, served only the interests of the ruler, condoning the violation of treaties and even political assassination. Not surprisingly, it was not always easy to draw a clear line between the two. It has been suggested that the creation of the language of *ragion di stato* caused a "revolution of politics", a shift

23 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Protestanti*, vol. II, 12 May 1609, p. 34: "*li gesuiti, buoni osservatori de tutti li precetti di Tacito*".

24 Sarpi, *Lettere ai Gallicani*, 17 August 1610, p. 89: "*Sed nihil magis nos expugnat quam Iesuitarum artes: eo magis perniciosae, quo minus cognoscuntur*". See also, Frajese 1994, pp. 216–217, for Sarpi's eagerness to imitate and learn from the Jesuits.

25 Viroli 1992, p. 267.

26 Botero, *Della ragione di stato*, p. 5: "*Stato è un dominio fermo sopra popoli; e ragione di stato è notitia di mezi atti a fondare, conservare, e ampliare un dominio così fatto*"; I use the English translation provided by Burke 1991, p. 480; Borrelli 1995, p. 181.

from the humanistic and Ciceronian appreciation of justice to such politics, which was inspired by a less honourable pursuit of interest.[27] Over time terms such as 'interest' and 'prudence' became associated with *ragion di stato* and owing to its dubious reputation the original concept itself came to be used in varied ways.[28]

Like most of his peers, Sarpi was aware of the division between 'good' and 'bad' *ragion di stato*. He offered a brief definition of the concept in his notes drawn from Tommaso Campanella's works: "the reason of state or of good government is an analogy or an emulation of *epikeia*: the latter concerns the true good, the first only that of the ruler".[29] According to Campanella's original argument, reason of state is a "name invented by tyrants to resemble *epikeia* or equity", although in reality "equity concerns the common good, reason of state that of the ruler". Campanella continued, that since the concept "is known to be wicked" because of Machiavelli, writers generally try to conceal the wickedness by referring to "reason of good government" instead of reason of state.[30] Sarpi's note equally identified reason of state with decisions which aimed to preserve the interest of the ruler, while equity stood for the 'true' good. His note was descriptive, not normative; although he distinguished between reason of state and *epikeia*, he in no way limited himself to exclusively following the principles embodied by the latter. Sarpi used the language of reason of state skillfully: he frequently used euphemisms such as "reason of

27 Viroli 1992, p. 1; Viroli 1995, p. 67.

28 Burke 1991, pp. 481–482; Borrelli 1995, pp. 184–185.

29 Sarpi, *Appunti sulla fortuna e la repubblica tratti da opere di Tommaso Campanella*, in *Pensieri*, p. 672: "*La raggione di stato o di buon governo è una similitudine o emula dell'epicheia: questa riguarda il vero bene quella il solo de chi governa*". Luisa Cozzi argues in her note in, Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 669, that Sarpi met Campanella at the home of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli some fifteen years prior to writing this remark in 1607.

30 I quote from Luisa Cozzi's note 7, in Sarpi, *Pensieri*, p. 672: "*La Ragione di Stato è nome trovato da tiranni a somiglianza della Epichea o Equità . . . Ma questa differenza è che l'Equità guarda il ben publico, la Ragione di Stato il proprio di chi domina, e per coprire questo nome conosciuto per tristo, dopo che scrisse il tristo Machiavello, oggi dicono la Ragione di Buon Governo*". For the legal concepts '*epikeia*' and '*aequitas*', see Pascoe 1973, pp. 65–68, who points out that both concepts (and especially *epikeia*) stood for such an interpretation of law, which was not bound to the law's strictly literal meaning, but considered particular circumstances as well and, therefore, "harmonizes rigorous justice with mercy and indulgence". While deriving from Aristotle, *epikeia* was put into Christian use by Aquinas and medieval canonists and together with *aequitas* it became associated with Christian concepts such as *dispensatio, misericordia, indulgentia* and *caritas*.

good government" and "public reasons" when he justified political decisions made by the government of Venice, but described the political action of foreign states in terms of *ragion di stato*.[31] Indeed, polemic writers of the period habitually referred to reason of state when describing the activities of their political rivals. Tommaso Campanella, for example, asserted that Venetians ruled their state "more according to reason of state than to the Gospel".[32] There were many, Sarpi amongst them, who believed that similar logic guided the Church of Rome.

The development of reason of state theory was closely linked to the rise of *ragion di chiesa*, the interest of the church. For centuries, secular political theorists had found inspiration from the church government. The medieval idea of papal *plenitudo potestatis*, for example, fed into the secular theory of absolutism.[33] Sarpi was familiar with this tradition and applied the notion of the pope's fullness of power to his idea of absolute sovereignty, but instead of acknowledging this he simply claimed—reproachfully—that Rome operated according to the principles of absolutism and *ragion di stato*. In the history of the Council of Trent, for instance, Sarpi argued that the reason of state that was applied in the court of Rome was based on the desire or "principal secret" of the popes to preserve their power. In order to achieve this the popes insisted on exempting bishops from the power of archbishops and abbots from that of bishops so that there would always be such people who felt obliged to defend the primacy and power of the pope.[34] Sarpi's interpretation of this was that deconstructing the old hierarchy enabled the papacy to centralize all authority in itself. Although highly critical of such an endeavour in the context of the Church of Rome, this was exactly what Sarpi sought to achieve in Venice.

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31 For the former, see, for example, Sarpi, *SS*, p. 460; for the latter, see Sarpi, ASV, *Consultori in iure*, 20 November 1619, f. 13, c. 381v : "*Questi* (the archduke of Austria) *e per ragione di parentela, e per ragione di stato veniva soccorso dall' Imp*(*eratore*)"; ibid., c. 382v: "*Spagnoli . . . nell'interesse di stato, e dar la pace con quelle conditioni, che più tornavano commode a loro*".

32 Campanella, *Lettere*, p. 40: "*Veneziani, che si governano più per ragion di stato che per l'Evangelio*".

33 Baldini 2001, p. 81; Tierney 1998, pp. 130–133.

34 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 289: "*Consideravano da tempo antichissimo aver i pontefici romani avuto per principale arcano di conservar il primato, datogli da Cristo, d'essimere i vescovi dagli arcivescovi, gli abbati da' vescovi, e così avere persone obligate a defenderlo*".

Neostoicism and Scepticism

At first sight a scholastic education and a markedly pessimistic view of human nature would hardly seem to point to an appreciation of classical studies and humanism. Sarpi, however, approved of humanism and classical studies insofar as they agreed with his deterministic view of man's destiny and his predilection for political realism. To this end, he read and admired Lipsius, Scaliger and Casaubon. Each of these writers advanced classical studies in ways which had a clear impact on the political philosophy of the period. Their interest in notions of obedience and constancy, for example, was particularly salient in formulations of late sixteenth-century absolutism. Indeed, marked by religious wars and the threat of the Ottoman Empire, this period saw widespread use of classical sources in treatises which favoured absolutism. Erudites such as Lipsius were especially interested in Seneca and Tacitus, for instance, because these authors advised on how to cope psychologically with unrest and how to rule a state in such a manner that order would be restored from chaos.

It was precisely the language of constancy and political pragmatism in Seneca and Tacitus—mediated by Lipsius—that appealed to Sarpi's desire to control the unpredictability of public affairs. While his ambition was bolstered by classical studies, Sarpi was not a humanist in the sense of scholars like Leonardo Bruni or Boggio Bracciolini: in him the humanistic pursuit of arts (which was supposed to manifest the excellence of mankind) only substantiated a political theory, which was grounded in the assumption that men were in many respects inferior to animals. Sarpi's point of view was primarily that of a scholastic and religious determinist who, rather than basing his political thought on humanistic assumptions about man's inherent potential, chose to wait for the opportunity given to him by God, a *sine qua non* without which any action was doomed to fail.

The same spirit of deterministic submission characterized Lipsius' Neostoic work *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae*. In it Lipsius reiterated Seneca's question "what is good for man?" and, again with Seneca, replied, "to accomplish his fate".[35] Sarpi expressed a similar view when he argued that the "end of man, like that of any other living thing, is to live", and concluded that it was best to "think that the most illustrious of your actions is the living".[36] There is a strong sense of disillusionment in the Stoic idea of tranquility, which consisted of a

35 Lipsius, *Politicorum*, p. 28: "*Quid enim est viri boni? Praebere se fato*". A marginal note indicates the source as Seneca's *De providentia*.

36 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 643: "*il fine dell'uomo, come d'ogn'altro animato, è vivere*"; *Pensieri medico-morali*, p. 617: "*pensa che la più illustre delle azzioni tue è il vivere*".

submission to fate and a mental withdrawal from the world of passions. Sarpi's Stoicism was nevertheless undercut by his scepticism and pessimism, as is evident from his remark that the "suitable goal for us to pursue, although unattainable, is painlessness", which amounted to "conservation of the structure of our disposition".[37] Here Sarpi drew on one of the crucial tenets of Stoicism and scepticism, namely the solid mental state of not being disturbed by anything. For sceptics this was called *ataraxia*, while Stoics referred to it as *apatheia*. Amongst Sarpi's contemporaries Lipsius, Montaigne and Charron embraced elements of the two philosophical schools.[38] Epicureans, in turn, emphasized the importance of pleasure, but, at least originally and in Sarpi's view as well, this took the form of a painless state. According to Montaigne,

> Our well-being is nothing but absence of ill-being. Therefore that philosophical school, which has most esteemed pleasure, has defined it as mere painlessness. To have no pain, this is the greatest good a man can hope for.[39]

However, on the following page Montaigne claimed that the absolute painlessness championed by Epicurus was not only impossible, but also undesirable, because without pain man was incapable of feeling pleasure. He expressed a wish to feel it when he was being "cauterized or incised", an idea which would have been repugnant to any Epicurean philosopher.

Sarpi too considered painlessness—which he identified with constancy and unchanging mind—unobtainable, but, unlike Montaigne, he never expressed any interest in strong passions. There was more than a tinge of humanism in Montaigne's desire to remain in touch with the imperfections of the world in order to be able to enjoy the good and, possibly, in order to better understand how to improve one's circumstances. Sarpi remained obstinately in the domain of pessimistic determinism, which recommended patience, obedience, secrecy and, finally, political pragmatism that overruled moral scruples, precisely because such qualms threatened to disturb the *apatheia* of his mind.

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37 Sarpi, *Pensieri medico-morali*, p. 603: "*Lo scopo nostro, dove convien mirare, se ben non ci si perviene, è l'indoglienza, cioè conservazione della costituzione della nostra composizione*".

38 Tuck 1993, pp. 49–51; Popkin 1979, pp. 42–62, and for the concept of *ataraxia*, *ibid.*, p. xv; Kogel 1972, pp. 69–72.

39 Montaigne, *Essais*, vol. II, chap. 12, p. 208: "*Notre bien-être, ce n'est que la privation d'être mal. Voilà pourquoi la secte de philosophie qui a le plus fait valoir la volupté, encore l'a-t-elle rangée à la seule indolence. Le n'avoir point de mal, c'est le plus avoir de bien que l'homme puisse espérer*".

As such his determinism was more extreme than that of most of his learned contemporaries. His total submission to secular authority, his quiet willingness to wait for *occasione*, and his adoption of Machiavellism, absolutism and reason of state theory are further evidence of his deterministic attitude in politics.

Justice and Law

Sarpi's insistence on the importance of obedience was the result of his belief in the fundamental conflict between the dictates of law and the will of an individual subject. According to him "the law" and "the natural inclination of the disposition that is opposed to it" formed the "two principles", which produced "continence and incontinence".[40] As such it was necessary for the ruler to ensure that the will of individual subjects complied with his legislation. In Sarpi's view, positive law represented not only the will of God, but also justice. He defined "the idea of just" as something that "everybody has to adapt their own will to", and as founded "not on nature, but on law". In keeping with the spirit of absolutism, Sarpi argued that what was just was whatever seemed appropriate to the "most powerful man or people".[41] Here Sarpi referred to what could be called positive justice, namely, the form of justice which is embodied in and communicated by civil law. Elsewhere he distinguished between divine and other kinds of justice—the former being "natural, immutable and commanded by God"—and concluded that "pontificial or sacerdotal or divine law is separated from civil law and the conscience".[42]

For Sarpi the justice that was implemented by civil law could never be objective, natural or immutable, and it was mediated through the seemingly arbitrary legislation of the sovereign ruler. True to his fideism and epistemological scepticism, Sarpi portrayed politics as something based on faith instead of reason. In order to function properly, political rule had to be elevated above

40 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 257, p. 226: "*La legge, e quella massimamente in cui sei abituato, e la naturale inclinazion della complessione contraria a quella, sono i due dettatori, che son causa della continenza e incontinenza*".

41 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 420, p. 318: "*L'idea del giusto è che ognuno il voler suo deve a quello accomodare. Non consta per natura, ma per legge, essendo ciò che pare al più potente o uomo o popolo*".

42 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 104: "*una giustizia naturale immutabile e commandata da Dio*"; Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, pp. 658–659: "*Tutte* (*le religioni*) *hanno la pietà parte della giustizia per commutare e rendere il dovere alla Divinità. E le altre parti della giustizia e delle altre virtù distinte da essa. Onde il* ius *pontifico o sacerdotale o divino separato dal* ius *civile e dalla conscienzia*".

the opinionated speculation and criticism inspired by each individual's own self-interest. In other words, supreme political power pertained exclusively to the sovereign ruler who alone could make laws which represented God's will. Indeed, Sarpi wrote that the "prince" of Venice had made laws that were "useful for his state, necessary for good government, and commanded by God". They were, in short, "in conformity with the will of God".[43] Sarpi believed that once civil law was understood as an expression of the mysterious will of God, the arbitrariness of legislation and its possibly displeasing contents would be acceptable to the majority of subjects. To this end, and in line with the recommendations of Tacitus, Machiavelli and the reason of state theorists, it was important to keep state affairs behind a veil of secrecy. While Sarpi acknowledged a difference between divine justice and the one which was conveyed by civil law, he nevertheless argued that there was no difference as far as the obligation to obey divine and human laws was concerned. " 'Human laws", Sarpi concluded, "have their force and virtue from the divine law".[44]

According to Sarpi justice reigned in those societies in which the subjects abandoned their own will and submitted themselves to the ruler's legislation for the sake of the common good. "Justice exists amongst those", he argued, "who have agreed to live with certain laws and not to take offence".[45] Sarpi's thought contains no traces of the later political theory which identified self-interest and the common good (championed for example by Bernard Mandeville). Rather, his point of view was grounded in the old Christian concept of self-negation and total submission of the self to greater powers. According to this point of view the pious act of self-negation was most evident in subjects' obedience to civil law, which in turn was considered the only effective way to promote the common good. "Good laws", Sarpi claimed, "keep the subjects in peace and abundance", because their "goal" was "public good and tranquility and the commodity of the individual".[46] He asserted elsewhere that "for the sake of the common good the prince can make whatever sort of laws", including laws "over the clergy and their possessions".[47] While the advancement of the common

43 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 460: "*utile allo stato suo, necessaria al buon governo e comandata da Dio*"; p. 461: "*conforme al voler di Dio*".

44 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. III, p. 10: "*le leggi umane hanno la sua forza e virtù dalla legge divina*".

45 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 261, p. 228: "*si crede la giustizia esser tra quegli, che di non offendersi e con certe leggi vivere son convenuti*".

46 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 460: "*buone legi che mantengano li sudditi in pace et in abondanza et abbino per fine il bene e la tranquillità publica et il comodo de' particolari*".

47 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 135: "*Per il ben commune il principe può fare qualunque sorte di legge, eziandio sopra alli ecclesiastici e sopra le cose loro*".

good might sound like a rational goal, Sarpi nevertheless denied reason any fundamental role in the process of legislation. He rejected the notion that that civil law was to be obeyed "not in virtue of law, but only in virtue of reason and convenience"[48] on the grounds that the truth, confirmed by "all the philosophers and theologians", was quite the opposite:

> there are two sorts of just things: one, which is just before its nature and therefore becomes commanded by law, and such are all the things commanded by natural law and reason; the second sort is one of those, which are by their nature neither just nor injust, and no one is obliged by nature and reason to do them in one way rather than the other, but when the law has decreed them in one way, they are just only in that way, and injust in the others. All things that are commanded by human laws are such that before the law there was no obligation by reason to act in one way rather than the other; but once the law is made the obligation comes by virtue of it and not of reason. Every civil law is of this kind.[49]

Civil law was therefore to be obeyed simply because it was a law, not by virtue of reason or suitability. It has been argued that for instance according to Montaigne any law, be it divine, natural or positive, bore in its very essence the inherent justification for being obeyed.[50] Sarpi specified that in case the clergy or any other particular group of people "were subjects only in virtue of reason", they would only be subjects to natural law, not to civil laws, which, he concluded, "are the foundation of the republic".[51] While natural law communicated principles, which were congruous with reason, it was nevertheless civil law upon which all political systems relied. This was because the dictates of reason and natural law were not sufficiently specific to be successfully

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48 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 486: "*non in virtù de lege, ma solo in virtù di ragione e convenienzia*".

49 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 486: "*vi sono due sorte di cosa giusta: una, che prima di sua natura è giusta, e per tanto vien comandata dalla lege, e tali sono tutte le cose comandate dalla lege naturale e dalla ragione; la seconda sorte è di quelle che di sua natura non sono né giuste né ingiuste, e nissuno è obligato per natura e ragione farle più ad un muodo che all´altro, ma doppo che la lege le ha statuite in un muodo, in quello solo sono giuste, e nelli altri ingiuste. Tutte le cose comandate dalle legi umane sono tali, che inanzi la lege non ci era obligo di ragione di operare più a un modo che all' altro; ma fatta la lege, l'obligazione nasce per virtù di essa, e non dalla ragione*".

50 Frajese 1994, pp. 131–132.

51 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 486: "*se li ecclesiastici fussero soggetti solamente per virtù della ragione, sarebbono soggetti alle soli legi che vengono dalla naturale, e non alle civili che sono fondamenti della republica*".

employed to governing a modern state. As a result, Sarpi and many of his contemporaries distanced themselves from divine and natural law and put greater emphasis on positive law as the proper guideline for and method of ruling. The German political philosopher Johannes Althusius (1563–1638) asserted that "administration and governance of a republic" consisted of "nothing but the execution of the law".[52] The reference was to positive law, which was needed because natural law was insufficient to coerce people away from the evil. Althusius concluded that it was therefore necessary that such people who are not guided by the "love of virtue" or the "hate of vice" be coerced by the "fear of punishment" imposed upon them by the civil law.[53] The resemblance between Sarpi and Althusius has been acknowledged.[54] In general, absolutistic writers such as Sarpi and Althusius agreed on the pivotal role of positive law and considered it the expression of the sovereign's will. No subject could make an appeal to divine or natural law against the dictates of positive law, which both Sarpi and Althusius invested with coercive power. True to his negative idea of human nature, however, Sarpi acknowledged that there would always be "audacious" people who would defy any prospect of punishment, whether human or divine in origin.[55]

In Sarpi's view, the short-sighted pursuit of self-interest led to disobedience, because it prevented the individual from submitting his own will to the requirements of the common good. The best way to deal with a clash of interests, Sarpi advised, was to focus on the legislator's "goal" instead of "that what accidentally follows" from the implementation of any particular law. He admitted that a law might accidentally cause harm to some of the subjects, but this had nothing to do with justice or injustice, because "justice never regards that what is produced accidentally". Some of the laws made by the senate of Venice, for example, accidentally violated the interest of the clergy, although their sole aim was to protect that of the subjects of Venice. It was important

52 Althusius, *Politica*, p. 403: "*administratio & gubernatio Reip. nihil aliud est, quam legis exsecutio*".

53 Althusius, *Politica*, p. 414: "*quia lex naturae non ita efficaciter cordibus hominum est inscripta, ut ea sit ad homines a malo coërcendum & ad bonum impellendum satis efficax . . . necesse igitur est, ut proprium jus accedat, quo homines, qui nec amore virtutis, vel odio vitii ducuntur, timore poenae, quam hoc jus in transgressores juris communis statuit, coërceantur*". With the common law, *jus communis*, Althusius meant the moral principles of the natural law, which were instilled in men by God. Civil law was needed to coerce men to observe these divinely inspired moral principles.

54 Pin 2001, p. 93.

55 Sarpi, *Pensieri*, no. 413, p. 314: "*timida o audace: se timida, con altri terrori a sufficienza si tiene; se audace, a tenerlo non basta qual si voglia, benché fosse maggiore*".

to understand, Sarpi argued, that the legislator's goal was not the harming of others (in this case the clergy), but simply the "conservation of the laity or his subjects", because according to the principles of charity and God's precise orders one should "first take care of one's own things".[56]

When writing in defence of secular rulers, Sarpi never implied that a legislator might have goals other than the promotion of the common good. It was his professional duty to defend the government of Venice, but this also mirrored his faith in the ultimate justness of secular legislation. Sarpi's trust in the legislator's capacity to produce the best possible law was unfaltering and only strengthened by his belief in the ruler's right to change his own laws. "Every prince", he argued, "can in his own state constitute according to the conditions" determined by time and place, and he can also "change things which have already been constituted" if the "changing of time so requires".[57] Besides its absolutistic content, this argument bears resemblance to *epikeia*, the principle of interpreting law not just by the letter, but also by taking into consideration the legislator's just intention and the particular circumstances that the legislator had to take into account. Sarpi's belief in *epikeia*, or the justness of law, was firm precisely because he believed that legislation derived from God and resulted in charity, which in turn generated peace and tranquility, the principal constituents of the common good. This interpretation of law and justice had its roots in the early church and St. Paul: while Jean Gerson argued that *epikeia* led to unity and peace, he also noted that in this respect he followed St. Paul's teachings.[58] This highlights St. Paul's influence not only on Sarpi's view of obedience, but also on his conception of civil law's contribution to the common good through the exercise of *epikeia*. It is impossible to fully understand Sarpi's concept of sovereignty, his extreme absolutism and blind obedience to secular rulers, if we ignore the role of *epikeia* and, in general, the centrality of legisla-

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56 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, pp. 136–137: "*Conviene guardare il fine dove direttamente mira il legislatore, e non quello che per accidente segue . . . la giustizia mai attende a quello che accidentalmente nasce . . . non si presume anco di far ingiuria al prossimo in quel che ha per mira la propria utilità . . . se bene per la legge l'ecclesiastico è privato dell'acquisto de'stabili, poiché il principe non mira a ciò, ma solo a conservare li secolari o sudditi suoi, non fa ingiuria alcuna alli ecclesiastici; e l'ordinata carità vuole che si attendi prima al proprio, e Dio così commanda*".

57 Sarpi, *IIAS*, vol. II, p. 105: "*ogni principe nel suo stato . . . può constituire secondo che le condizioni de'tempi e luoghi comportano, e mutare anco le cose una volta constituite, se la mutazione de'tempi lo ricerca*".

58 Pascoe 1973, pp. 76–77 (as Pascoe points out, in Gerson's opinion the end of all law was charity, while *epikeia* meant precisely the interpretation of law in accordance with charity); Lloyd 1991, p. 266.

tion to Sarpi's political thought, let alone his interpretation of the ruler or the legislator himself as the minister of God and, therefore, the mediator of divine will, which could never be unjust. In line with Sarpi, Micanzio argued that the sovereign decided over public affairs precisely because he knew all the particular circumstances. While a particular decision might have appeared "bad" to a private subject, Micanzio concluded, the sovereign knew it to be "good and necessary".[59] This suggests that Micanzio shared Sarpi's epistemological scepticism and belief in two different types of knowledge: one divine and perfect, the other human and flawed. All sovereign rulers were to be obeyed, because they had access to divine knowledge.

Custom

Sarpi's political rhetoric was characterized by sensitivity to history, an approach which emphasized the role of old customs in the process of state formation. This historical sensibility reflected his pragmatic view of political affairs. In particular such laws and customs, which had a long history—Sarpi seems to have argued—expressed the will of God. This testifies to his fundamentally conservative outlook and to his aversion to change. He would have obeyed any new law made by the government of Venice, but clearly favoured the observance of already existing body of laws. For him, the paragon of good legislation was embodied in old customs.

The identification of custom with written law had long been commonplace amongst lawyers and had its roots in *Digest*, the classical compendium of Roman law, in which custom was referred to as "the best interpreter of written law". From the twelfth century onwards custom could also have written form.[60] By that time 'custom' had the status of a tangible legal concept and the process of 'choosing' customs came close to what we might refer to as legislation.[61] There were, however, variations in precisely how lawyers and political thinkers defined the nature of and the interplay between law and custom. For instance, during the sixteenth century, Isidore of Seville's (560–636) seminal assertion that positive laws should be "in accordance with the custom of the country" was overshadowed by Etienne Pasquier's claim that custom could never challenge the law (since the former was made by the people and the latter by the prince).

59 Micanzio, *Annotazioni e pensieri*, no. 50, pp. 786–787: "*quello che a privato parerà male, al principe, che vede la ragione di tutto il governo, lo conosce bene e necessario*".

60 Kelley 1991, p. 84.

61 Tierney 1982, p. 37.

Domingo de Soto in turn argued more loosely that "law is not moved according to custom", although "it should not conflict with the custom of the country".[62]

Sarpi shared Isidore of Seville's point of view. As we have seen, he stressed the importance of frequent 'acts of superiority' on the part of the sovereign. In this respect his point of view was not dissimilar from Hobbes' argument that law as such, as "words and paper", was useless without "hands and swords". "The power of the law", Hobbes asserted, "is the rule of actions onely".[63] Furthermore, Sarpi gave precedence to rules, which were in harmony with local traditions and questioned the value of such laws, which were purely theoretical and had never been put into practice. He went as far as to claim that custom was superior to written law, because the latter was decreed before it had been tested in practice and could therefore prove unsuitable (which would lead to its abrogation). In contrast to written law, Sarpi argued, custom "is proven before being authorized" and this is why 'it is more stable, and its justice is more certain'.[64]

Arguing that custom was more just than written law served Sarpi's defense of the ancient Venetian custom of prosecuting members of the clergy. However, besides vindicating Venice's jurisdictional practices, Sarpi's defence of custom also embodied a deeper insight about the nature and the development of the rules according to which a state was formed and governed. He admitted that certain things could not be granted to a person simply in virtue of custom (for example, a layman could never give the mass), but political power was not one of them. On the contrary, one could gain such power "through privilege or in some other way" and, if one was "capable", also "through custom".[65] The acquisition of political power through custom followed a point at which the subjects over whom political rule had been established (by force, if necessary) came to terms with the situation and accepted subordination to what may originally have been an arbitrary and violent act of usurpation. According to Sarpi this subjection eventually turned into a habitual state of affairs, which was considered fully legitimate by the ruler and the ruled alike precisely because it was based on an old custom.[66] While he argued that "custom equals to the written

62 Lloyd 1991, pp. 267–269.

63 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 46, pp. 699–700.

64 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 500: "*è prima provata inanzi che autorizata . . . è più stabile, e la sua giustizia è più certa*".

65 Sarpi, *SS*, pp. 499–500: "*Ma l'uomo non ha una potestà, però la può avere o per privilegio o per altro muodo; si che, se è capace, con la consuetudine l'acquista*".

66 Sarpi, *Massime*, in *Pensieri*, p. 711: "*Li abusi tolerati acquistano nome di consuetudine e finalmente forza di lege*" ("tolerated abuses obtain the name of custom and finally the force of law").

law" and that "every common man can say: custom is another law", Sarpi also pointed out that it was only accidental to a law that it should be written and blurred the boundaries between custom and written law even more by stressing that it was only the "essence" of the law that was decreed by the sovereign and that the validity of the law was based on the intention of the sovereign, which was manifested not only in writing, but also, and more so, in the concrete application or observance of the law (or custom).[67]

The idea that an act of usurpation should be tolerated was in line with Sarpi's deterministic attitude and desire to serve higher forces. Indeed, he justified his acceptance of usurpation in terms of natural law: "it is not only a natural law", he argued in *Pensieri sulla religione*, "but always a fact too, that the weaker is subject to the stronger when particular circumstances are considered".[68] At the same time, however, he understood perfectly well the difficulty of directly applying the tenets of natural or divine law to human societies. As a particularly striking example of this Sarpi offered the biblical principle, which urges us not to do to others what we would not want to be done to ourselves (Tob 4:16) and noted that it could not be a "good principle", because, if it was not made into a law, it only gave leeway to "infinite absurdities", while as a law it would have been utterly inapplicable to practice. The principle was against nature, Sarpi added grimly, because there was "no self-preservation without the destruction of others".[69] His emphasis on the concrete application of positive law and insistence on the importance of 'acts of superiority' pointed towards Machiavellian statecraft and a firm rejection of the applicability of objective, immutable moral principles to political reality. Apart from the idea of self-preservation and the principle that "the weaker is subject to the stronger", Sarpi identified custom as the basis for sound political rule. To this end, no other kind of knowledge provided better understanding of the necessities of the art of ruling than history.

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67 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 500: "*E quantonque sii dottrina nota a tutti che la consuetudine equivaglia alla lege scritta, sì che ogni volgare sa dire:* consuetudo est altera lex … *è cosa accidentale alla lege che sii scritta; solo è di essenza sua che sii statuita dalla somma potestà; la quale allora dà virtù allo statuto, quando manifesta la sua intenzione, che non solo si fa chiara quando si pone in scritto, ma più quando si pone in opera*".

68 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 667: "*Non solamente è* ius naturale *ma è anco sempre in fatto che il più debole è sotto il più forte considerate le circonstanze particolari*".

69 Sarpi, *Pensieri sulla religione*, p. 667: "*Non fare ad altri quel che per te non voresti non può esser buon principio perché se non ci aggiongi* iure *da in una infinità di absurdità per li vari caprici; se ce l'aggiongi, adonque se sarà difficoltà* quid iuris *come è sempre per le cose dette, non si potrà mai applicar all'opera … se l'intendi assolutamente è contra natura non essendo la conservazion propria senza destruzione d'altri*".

History and the Art of Ruling

In eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were many writers who praised Sarpi as a historian. Their eulogies issued no doubt from true admiration for Sarpi's style and acumen, but often also from antipapal or anticlerical attitudes. In fact, ever since Sarpi's own time his credibility as a historian has been praised or contested according to the critic's own position with regard to the Church of Rome. Sarpi's histories were admired by such figures as David Hume (1711–1776), Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751), William Robertson (1721–1793) and Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), all of whom regarded Sarpi as an exemplary historian ranking amongst writers such as Livy, Tacitus, Machiavelli and Guicciardini.[70] In a letter written to Horace Walpole Hume apologized for not having used footnotes in his own historical work, since he was "seduc'd by the example of all the best historians ever among the moderns, such as Matchiavel (*sic*), Fra Paolo, Davila, Bentivoglio; without considering that that practice was more modern than their time".[71] Gibbon, in turn, highly esteemed Sarpi's *Trattato delle materie beneficiarie*, which he called a "golden volume", and which he expected to outlive "Rome and her religion" as a "philosophical history and salutary warning".[72] Sarpi's expertise was also appreciated by historians such as Henry Hallam (1777–1859), Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), Carlo Botta (1766–1837) and Rawdon Brown (1803–1883) who went as far as to compare Sarpi to Shakespeare, both being "perfect writers".[73]

Attacks on Sarpi as a historian were usually reactions to his criticism of the papacy. One of the earliest examples of this was cardinal Sforza Pallavicino's history of the council of Trent, which was published in 1656 and aimed to "dispel those shadows that the ink of the enemy spread around" the council.[74]

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70 Burke 2006, p. 103; Bouwsma 1968, p. 627.

71 I quote from Wootton 1994, p. 82.

72 See Cozzi's introductory note in Sarpi, *Opere*, p. 244.

73 Thompson 1954, p. 546. Thompson himself compares Sarpi—"the towering figure of the Counter-Reformation"—to Leonardo da Vinci; Trevelyan 1908, p. 544, note 1, quoted Macaulay's letter from September 1850: "Fra Paolo is my favourite modern historian. His subject did not admit of vivid painting; but, what he did, he did better than anybody. I wish that he had not kept his friar's gown; for he was undoubtedly at heart as much a Protestant as Latimer".

74 Pallavicino, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, p. 72: "*dileguar quell'ombre, che l'inchiostro del nemico gli sparse d'intorno*". Similar attacks on Sarpi were produced by Scipione Errico in his *Censura theologica et historica adversus Petri Soavi Polani de Concilio Tridentino pseudo-historiam* (1651) and by Jacques Benigne Bossuet who considered Sarpi a worthless

According to Pallavicino Sarpi's history of the council of Trent consistently defended "the actions of the heretical side" while "condemning those of the Catholics".[75] Writing as a high prelate Pallavicino had access to source material in the Vatican unavailable to Sarpi, although the material used by Sarpi for his history of the council of Trent has been proven to be valid and original.[76]

A very different interpretation of Sarpi—and Pallavicino himself—was given by Voltaire (1694–1778), the French intellectual par excellence known for his deistic approach to religion. Both historians told the truth, Voltaire allowed, but in a different manner; they may have agreed on essential facts, he noted but introduced Sarpi as "the famous Sarpi, defender of the Venetian liberty", while Pallavicino was simply "the Jesuit Pallavicini, his antagonist".[77] Voltaire equally observed that they wrote their histories from very different perspectives: "one as a free man, as a defender of a free senate, the other as a Jesuit who wanted to be a cardinal".[78]

It was not only other people's assessments of Sarpi's histories that were politically inspired, his histories themselves carried this mark due to their decidedly anti-papal attitude. Writing as the principal adviser to the senate of Venice Sarpi's position was necessarily political and, apart from the *pensieri*, this was evident in all of his writings. In the context of the interdict crisis a defence based on purely and exclusively legal argumentation would not have carried sufficient rhetorical strength. The very foundation of Sarpi's defence of Venetian independence was the claim that the 'prince' of Venice had received power directly from God. In addition to his theoretical justification of the divine right theory, the legitimacy of this claim rested on references to old customs, which required the study and publication of historical facts which demonstrated that such customs had been in use since time immemorial.

The importance of history in Sarpi's vision of politics was reflected in his idea of *occasione*, in his use of the myth of Venice, and, most significantly, in his view of history as a means of contributing to current political debates.

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historian, whereas the Protestant Johann Jacop Muller, for instance, praised Sarpi and his work in 1661 (Da Pozzo 1968, pp. 14–15). For other seventeenth-century critics of Sarpi, see Pallavicino, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, p. 86 footnote 28. For Ludvig von Pastor's attack on Sarpi, see the discussion here in chapter 7.

75 Pallavicino, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, p. 61: "*difendendo sempre le azioni della parte eretica e condannando quelle della cattolica*".

76 Da Pozzo 1968, p. 14; Vivanti 1974, pp. lxxviii–lxxix; Wootton 1983, pp. 104–105.

77 Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, p. 498: "*Le célèbre Sarpi, ce défenseur de la liberté vénitienne . . . le jésuite Pallavicini, son antagoniste*".

78 Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, pp. 498–499: "*méprises dans les dates et dans les noms . . . l'un en homme libre, défenseur d'un sénate libre; l'autre en jésuite qui voulait être cardinal*".

As far as *occasione* is concerned, Sarpi did not regard it just as a sudden, unpredictable event, but as a situation brought about by a gradual, discernible historical development.[79] In his view, it was possible to be well prepared for such a situation. As we have seen, he referred to the "science of opportunity" and considered himself an "artificer" who "gathers material" while waiting for the opportunity to emerge. Sarpi's references to *occasione* were made with regard to international politics, which he followed through his networks in Venice and through his correspondence. His writings, including some *pensieri*, reveal a keen historical awareness and a persistent tendency to assess current affairs against the backdrop of history. This helped him to grasp the historical significance of the interdict crisis, which he considered the *occasione* of his lifetime. Correspondingly, seizing the opportunity which was provided by the papal interdict required knowledge of history, especially the history of the church.

It has been noted that, as an adviser, Sarpi moved away from the typically legalistic argumentation of traditional jurists and, instead, made a more concrete and exclusively political use of law and history.[80] Indeed, his vision of statecraft was one based on pragmatism and historical understanding of the key problems in public affairs and international relations. His political rhetoric was equally informed by historical awareness. When not resorting to divine right theory, Sarpi justified political power by referring to actual, historical practices. No one, he insisted, could question Venice's sovereignty, if it was described as one based on "immemorial custom".[81]

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79 For the historical aspect of Sarpi's concept of *occasione*, see Vivanti 1974, p. lx; and Ulianich 1979, pp. 186–187.

80 Barzazi 1985, p. 226.

81 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 474: "*se Vostra Serenità fonderà la potestà sua e delli suoi magistrati su l'auttorità che ha per consuetudine immemorabile . . . nissun potrà entrar giudice a vedere se questa auttorità sii stata abusata*".

CHAPTER 9

Epilogue

The tension between medieval and modern tendencies is one of the most fundamental characteristics of Sarpi's thought. On the one hand he studied theology and natural sciences and insisted on the fundamental dependence of everything on the will of God. The fact that he was interested in both theology and natural sciences was in line with a medieval tradition, which—following Aquinas—sought to combine reason and faith. Sarpi's insistence on the importance of divine will in turn linked him to the voluntarism of Duns Scotus whose work he knew well through his early teacher Giovanni Maria Capella. On the other hand, Sarpi did make a drastic break from the Thomist synthesis of reason and faith, or philosophy and religion, and embraced fideism. This, together with his strict separation of the spiritual from the earthly, suggests a modern worldview, which emphasized human agency in the affairs of the world. A certain sense of modernity is also implied by the fact that his political attitude was more akin to Machiavellian than Christian ethos, as we have seen, and that he dedicated his later life to political and historical rather than theological studies. Yet his 'modern' approach to politics was thoroughly conditioned by his concept of *occasione*, which entailed the submission of human agency to the impenetrable will of God. While Sarpi acknowledged the value of *recta ratio* or 'right appetite' as guiding principles for man, he also identified these principles with divine will. By following the dictums of right reason the elect only observed God's volition. Therefore, according to Sarpi human agency was intertwined with God's will in a similar fashion as the freedom of the will: for Sarpi man's actions were free insofar they issued from God's initiative. Freedom, like everything else, came from God.

Sarpi's political objectives—his defence of secular power and critique of the papacy—and his terse, cynical writing style have an undeniably modern quality to them, but, at the same time, he was immersed in medieval traditions as far as the subject matter of his writings is concerned. A great deal of his historical writing was dedicated to the description and analysis of corruption within the church, for instance. Moreover, his writings were often in dialogue with Church Fathers and medieval thinkers, a fact which underlines the medieval aspect of his thought. His writings do not accommodate a great narration of the history of mankind, evolving from the more primitive towards the more developed under the wise guidance of heroic men of reason. On the contrary, Sarpi made it clear at the outset of his history of the council of Trent that

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despite the original goal to unite the church the assembly in fact culminated in "irreconcilable discord", which is why he considered it best to "dedicate one's thoughts to God" and not to trust in "human wisdom".[1] This remark—while it reflects the great distance that Sarpi postulated between man and God—was at once in line with his deterministic submission to divine will and at odds with his worldly and reformist ambitions. It might seem strange to encounter such a pessimistic and deterministic statement (which seems to annul all human agency) at the beginning of a lengthy, politicized history, the embodiment of his industrious attempt to make a difference. However, the contradiction is lessened if we return to consider the medieval intellectual traditions to which Sarpi was heir, traditions such as determinism and voluntarism. Micanzio's biography repeatedly made the point that Sarpi did not want to write anything for publication. The interdict crisis changed everything, Micanzio wrote: "it pleased God to call him to work". Sarpi devotedly obeyed this call to "serve God and patria". Furthermore, Micanzio observed that a "secular polity" was established by God and serving it offered to a "good man" such a "pious and excellent" way to "serve his divine majesty" that it could not be surpassed by any other way of serving God.[2] Sarpi clearly considered his service to the government of Venice identical to service to God.

The great distance that Sarpi observed between man and God had significant implications for his political and religious thought. In the first place, Sarpi denied man any precise knowledge of divine matters and by so doing challenged theologians' power to interpret God's word. Secondly, his vision of a distant and inexplicable God led him to shift his interests from purely theological questions to those related to history and politics. Accordingly, while he acknowledged that everything, including *occasione*, issued from providence or divine will, it was nevertheless through the study of history—not theology—that mankind could gain understanding of its own role, purpose and destiny. Sarpi's reading of history was dominated by decline, corruption and the abuse of power, a perspective which mirrors his position as a late sixteenth-century Augustinian according to whom man's existence was flawed, sin-ridden and dependent on God's will. At the same time, however, Sarpi was inspired by

1 Sarpi, *Tridentino*, vol. I, p. 6: "*chiaro documento di rasignare li pensieri in Dio e non fidarsi della prudenza umana*".

2 Micanzio, *Vita*, p. 1329: "*piacque a Dio chiamarlo ad opere alle quali non avrebbe mai pensato doversi applicare . . . Il nostro padre ci darà l'essempio di non ricusare né fatica, né pericoli per il servizio di Dio e della patria . . . polizia secolare . . . sia instituita da Dio, et in cui l'uomo da bene può servire a sua divina Maestà con vocazione tanto pia et eccellente, che o nissun' altra l'uguaglia, o di corso non la supera*".

reformist ideals and the desire to purge the church and the clergy of corruption. The dichotomy between Augustinian pessimism and reformist objectives formed a deep undercurrent, which cut through every aspect of his persona, and which defined him as a thinker and politician. He was a pessimist and a reformer, at once subdued by a gripping sense of determinism and elated by his mission as God's minuscule instrument to fight corruption and promote the practices of the early church.

Paralyzed by his determinism, Sarpi depended on God's intervention in the form of *occasione*. For him, the moment of recognizing this opportunity or "compelling necessity" to execute God's will, represented the point at which the human mind was able to understand the predestined divine order of all things. This enlightenment was reserved for the elect like Sarpi himself, for persons who possessed the faith and the ensuing clarity of mind, if not powerful enough to distinguish between right and wrong, then at least capable of understanding the necessity of obedience and willing to follow the quintessential principles of charity. While Sarpi emphasized the inscrutability of divine will, he equally postulated a mysterious connection between God and the human executor of his will. He never pretended to possess any such knowledge, which would have revealed the contents of divine will, but argued that the sovereign ruler, as the true minister of God, had the power to interpret and execute God's will through the implementation of civil laws. These laws were expected to mirror divine volition. Sarpi understood his role as that of a humble assistant whose task it was to study old customs and the disorderly mass of past legislation, both civil and canonic, in order to best justify the ruler's will. The results of these studies—lengthy pamphlets, *consulti* and histories—were addressed to the pope and his advocates in what Sarpi himself described as a "war of writings".[3] For him, this was a war between men, waged far from heavenly purity and thus stained by intrigue and Machiavellian statecraft. On both sides history was unscrupulously employed for political ends, but, arguably, Sarpi's *Trattato delle materie beneficiarie* and *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* marked the paragon of such writing.

Sarpi's thought and character centred on the Christian idea of humility, which manifested itself not only in his critique of human reason, but also in his total submission to the service of higher forces. These forces did not include the Church of Rome, because, in Sarpi's view, it had become alienated from the core Christian principles of humility, spirituality and charity. Sarpi was a Servite friar who had taken the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. His criticism of the papacy was spiritual, not irreligious. Reading across the

3 Sarpi, *SS*, p. 284: "*un'altra sorte di guerra, fatta con scritture*".

breadth of his interests reveals that contrary to atheism, Sarpi's religious sentiments were devout. As we have seen, St. Paul and St. Augustine bore a particularly strong imprint on his thought. The Protestant Reformation and the humanist plea for a return to *ad fontes* were no doubt other such sources of influence, which, while encouraging Sarpi to embrace *sola fide* and *sola scriptura* principles, inspired his criticism of what he perceived as corruption in the Church of Rome.

The theological doctrines to which Sarpi subscribed were few but clear: salvation depended entirely on God's will and man had no part in it; everything was predestined and only the elect would be saved; charity was the most fundamental law and it issued from divine grace; religious principles were based solely on the Scripture; God was omnipotent and in the highest, man weak and in the lowest position; Christ was a mediator between the two. Sarpi explicitly expressed his support for each of these principles. The fact that in his *Arte di ben pensare* Sarpi rejected the idea of the immortality of the soul while his other writings were fully compatible with Christianity has given rise to contrasting views about his religious belief. In this book I have argued that Sarpi was a Christian mortalist who believed in the soul's natural mortality, but also in its eventual resurrection on the day of judgment. He made a strict distinction between this world and the kingdom of God: that which pertained to the former was necessarily ephemeral, mortal and dependent on God's inscrutable will.

Sarpi was not a defender of republican liberty, but a servant of the 'lieutenant of God', the sovereign 'prince' of Venice. His absolutism reflected his negative idea of human nature and scepticism of republican notions such as civic liberty. In Sarpi's view, it was only natural for the strong to govern the weak and this hierarchy was based on the power granted to the former by God. Sarpi's politics were fundamentally hierarchical and aimed to curb resistance, disobedience and anarchy. His fear of social unrest mirrored his fascination with natural phenomena such as motion; he considered happiness impossible because of the ubiquity of motion and unrest. While the virtuous life was conducive to the "equilibrium of mind" of an individual citizen, civic harmony was best guaranteed by a political system based on absolutism. Needless to say, Sarpi's understanding of virtuous life emphasized obedience and constant adaptation to external circumstances.

Sarpi's deterministic and pessimistic view of the nature of man gave him an enduring desire to serve a cause greater than his own self. Over the course of his lifetime, that which he saw as the conflation of the spiritual and temporal interests of the clergy made serving God through the church increasingly problematic. As a result, he internalized his faith and submitted himself to

the service of secular authority. At the same time, both his philosophical and political writings were concerned with the interplay between two opposing poles; motion and control. Far more political than other scientists interested in the phenomenon of motion, Galileo among them, Sarpi made his greatest contribution to the field of political thought. His extensive exposition of church-state relations fused the secular languages of Machiavellism and reason of state with a reformist faith in the early church. His ecclesio-political ideas echoed both those of the Church Fathers, and of sixteenth-century reformers. While his writings made use of a rhetoric and vocabulary that drew on contemporary political theories, his thought remained profoundly rooted in medieval intellectual traditions. At the core of his thinking was an unflinching commitment to serve the will of an unknowable God. It was this faith in the ultimately divine cause of all human affairs that was to shape his life and work, and which defined him as a servant of God and state.

Appendices

Appendix One

From a Draft of a Letter of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti to Sarpi in 1570[1]

"Quas ad me (de praedestinatione et reprobatione) misisti conclusiones, gratissimae mihi fuerunt; et si enim plurimum pollere te ingenio facile cognovi ex his quae alias Bononiae coram doctissimis viris tam docte tam sapienter disputasti, qaudeo tamen quod nostris monitis et consiliis maiora etiam et graviora in dies de virtute et doctrina tua argumenta praebeas. Quod si ab isto ingenii tui acumine et literis quibus es insignitus non distabit vitae probitas ac morum honestas, simulque iactantiam evitandam et humilitatem amplectendam duxeris, non dubito quin veram laudem apud omnes consequaris. Ego quandiu eris is, quem te fore confido, et a mea in te benevolentia nunquam cessabo, et omnibus officiis ornandum te et augendum curabo. Fac valeas et meis verbis praeceptori tuo (fra Giovanni Maria Capella) salutem plurimam dicas."

Appendix Two

The Letter of 10 November 1601 from Nuncio Offredi to Cardinal Aldobrandini[2]

"Illustrissimo et reverendissimo signor padrone colendissimo. Non acquieto la conscenza alla relatione, che con una lettera ho dato a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima dei duoi suggetti per il vescovado di Nona, e questo per quel che concerne la persona di quel maestro Paulo de Servi, il quale m'è stato messo in concetto d'huomo, che possa creder qualcosa di quel che non si deve, e non creder in qualche altra parte quel che siamo obligati. Anzi che ho sentito mormorare alle volte che egli con alcuni altri faccino una scoletta piena di errori. È ben vero che in queste cose non voglio metter niente del mio, e però mi scarico con dir a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima che due persone particulari mi hanno messo questo scrupolo, l'uno il padre maestro Ghabrielo (Gabriele Dardano, Venetian Servite friar and Sarpi's antagonist) favourito da Lei al vicariato generale dell'Ordine dei Servi, l'altro il padre Achille Gagliardi Gesuita molto ben cognosciuto e da Nostro Signore e da Vostra Signoria Illustrissima, e questo ultimo mi afferma d'haverlo tocco con mano. Imperò (prego) Vostra Signoria Illustrissima perch'io non habbia mai d'haver ramarico d'haver fatto danno a questo huomo, se queste

1 Branchesi 2006, p. 54.

2 Branchesi 2006, p. 68.

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cose non fossero vere, di voler giustificare molto bene questo dubio, con il campo, che gliene do, e far conto ch'io non habbia scritto questa lettera, della quale la suplico a tenermi secreto, perché questo huomo è padrone di mezza città, et io temerei d'irritarmelo, quando si sapessi questo offitio, il quale non havrei ommesso mai, trattandosi di quel che si tratta, e a Vostra Signoria bacio humilissimamente le mani."

Appendix Three

From a Letter of the Papal Nuncio in Venice to Cardinal Borghese in 1609[3]

"Fra Paolo, the Servite, attempts in all his actions to present a good and exemplary appearance to the people and frequently celebrates the mass. For some time, however, he has left off going into the choir and does not confess in church but confesses in the room of one of his friends. He has also left off going to the common table and eats alone or with Fra Fulgenzio. He studies much and, it is said, is writing a book about the authority of the supreme Roman pontiff with the idea of having it printed abroad. He goes often into the College, as consultore of the most Serene Republic, on the business on which they consult with him, in which these lords credit him more than I can say. He converses almost every day for a long time in the shop of certain Flemish merchants named Cecchinelli, at the *ponte di Berettari in merciaria*, and talks with many foreigners, who have bad opinions in the things of religion, and similarly with nobles who are badly affected towards the Apostolic See. When he goes through Venice, he wears chain mail, gauntlets and probably other armor, and three well-armed *frati* also walk behind."

Appendix Four

From a Letter of Sir Henry Wotton to Dr. Collings, Professor of Divinity in Cambridge[4]

"I am desirous to characterize a little unto you such part of his (Sarpi) nature, customes and abilities, as I have had occasion to know by sight or enquiry. He was one of the humblest things that could be seen within the bounds of humanity; the very pattern of that precept, *quanto doctior, tanto submissior*; and enough alone to demonstrate that knowledge well digested *non inflat*; excellent in Positive, excellent in Scholastic and Polemical Divinity; a rare Mathematician, even in the most abstruse

3 Bouwsma, 1968, pp. 493–494.

4 Wotton, Henry, "Letters".

parts thereof, as in Algebra and the Theoricks; and yet withal as expert in the History of Plants, as if he had never perused any book but Nature: lastly, a great Canonist, which was the title of his ordinary service with the state: and certainly in the time of the Pope's Interdict, they had their principal light from him. When he was either reading or writing alone, his manner was to sit fenced with a castle of paper about his chair, and over head; for he was of our Lord of S. Alban's opinion, that all air is praedatory, and especially hurtful, when the spirits are most imployed. You will find a scar in his face (Wotton sent a portrait of Sarpi to Collings), that was from a Roman assassinate that would have killed him, as he was turned to the wall near his Covent; and if there were not a greater Providence about us, it might often have been easily done, especially upon such a weakly and wearish body. He was of a quiet and settled temper, which made him prompt in his consulti, and answers, and the same in Consultations which Themistocles was in action, as will appear unto you in a passage between him and the Prince of Conde; the said Prince in a voluntary journey toward Rome came to Venice, where to give some vent to his own humours, he would often devest himself of his greatness, and after other less laudable curiosities, not long before his departure, a desire took him to visit the famous obscure Servite, to whose Cloyster coming twice he was the first time denied to be within; at the second it was intimated, that by reason of his daily admission to their deliberatives in the place he could not receive the visit of so illustrious a personage, without leave from the senate, which he would seek to procure. This set a great edge on the Prince, when he saw he should confer with one participant of more than Monkish Speculations: so after leave gotten, he came the third time, and there besides other voluntary discourse . . . he assailed with a question, enough to have troubled any man but himself, and him too, if a precedent accident had not eased him. The question was this: he desired to be told by him before his going away, who was the true unmasked Author of the late Tridentine History . . . the good Father came fairly off; for on a sudden, laying all together, that to disavow the Work was an untruth, to affirme it a danger, and to say nothing, an incivility; he took a middle evasion, telling the Prince, that he understood he was going to Rome, where he might learn at ease who was the Author of that Work, as they were freshly intelligenced from thence (by De Dominis, that is) . . . I have taken pleasure to remember that man whom God appointed and furnished for a proper Instrument to anatomize that Pack of reverend Cheaters. Among whom, I speak of the great part, *Exceptis senioribus*, Religion was shuffled like a pair of cards, and the dice so many years were set upon us."

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